Erykah Badu is back with her first album in 11 years

→ *Film & Music*

Chaka Khan's best songs *Ranked!*

The Guardian

Friday
28 August 2026
£3.50
From £2.40 for subscribers

Race to get aid to Nepal and Tibet amid warnings of further floods

Hundreds of tourists among the missing, with death toll nearing 400

Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Gaurav Pokharel *Kathmandu*
Sam Jones

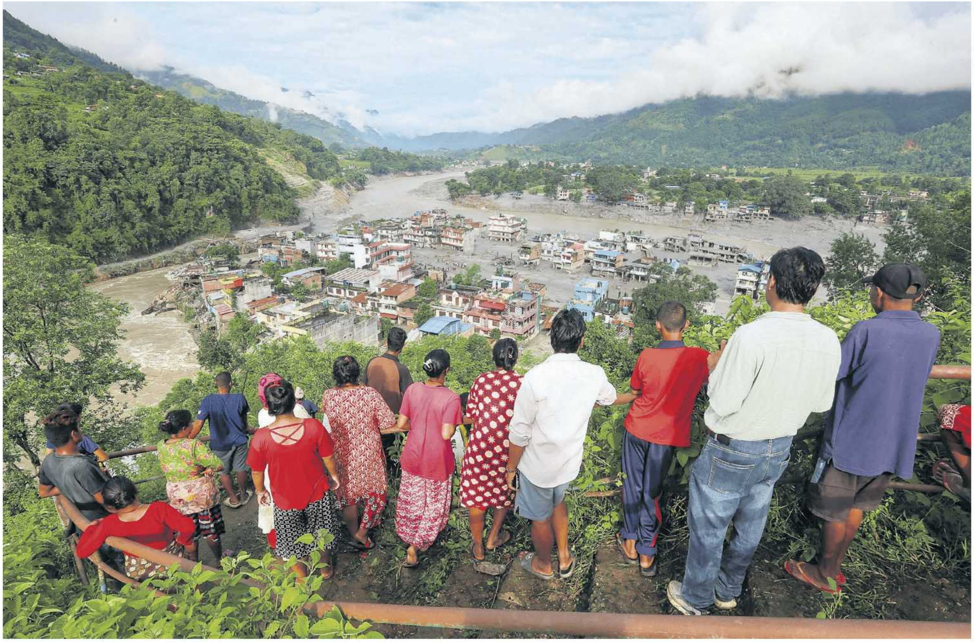
The international community was scrambling yesterday to get aid into flood-stricken parts of Nepal and Tibet as authorities warned that a lake that had formed at the site where the deadly torrents occurred was rising and at risk of bursting.

The flash floods that hit Nepal and Tibet on Wednesday, thundering down valleys and obliterating entire villages, killed at least 389 people and left more than 1,300 missing.

Efforts to locate those unaccounted for - including hundreds of tourists from India, the US, Britain, Australia and Canada - have been complicated by the destruction of dozens of bridges and 25 miles of roads in the region, which is popular with trekkers and pilgrims.

Rescue teams reported finding bodies hundreds of miles downstream from the disaster zone in the Chitwan district of Nepal, near the Tibetan border. Dozens of injured people were transported to Kathmandu for advanced medical care and more than 100 were rescued by Nepali army personnel in helicopters.

4 →



▲ *Displaced people above flood waters in Nuwakot, Nepal, yesterday. Bodies were found hundreds of miles downstream* PHOTOGRAPH: SANJIT PARIYAR/SHUTTERSTOCK

Russia: UK 'playing with fire' by supporting Kyiv

Peter Beaumont
Jessica Elgot

Russia has said it could retaliate against the UK for its support of Kyiv by striking military targets inside and outside Ukraine, amid reports that the director of the CIA warned the Kremlin against attacking Nato during a secretive visit to Moscow this week.

Andy Burnham, the prime minister, said on Monday that the UK would allow Kyiv access to classified technology to start its own production of Storm Shadow long-range cruise missiles. France has also agreed to supply missile technology. Maria Zakharova, Russia's foreign ministry spokesperson, accused Britain and France of "playing with fire".

Responding to the latest threats, the Ministry of Defence reiterated UK support for Ukraine. "Britain stands shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine and we are committed to providing the equipment Ukraine needs to defend itself against Putin's illegal invasion. Russia should be in no doubt about the resolve of this government to stand against Russian aggression, in Ukraine and against the UK and our allies," it said.

The Wall Street Journal reported that a visit by John Ratcliffe, the CIA chief, to Moscow on Tuesday had followed a US intelligence assessment that Russia could be planning to test Nato with a limited assault on an allied country. This could range from a cyber-attack to a small-scale incursion, probably in a Baltic nation.

Russia has made frequent threats against Ukraine's western allies during the war, including thinly veiled nuclear threats and others apparently aimed at diplomatic missions in Kyiv.

Asked to comment on the reports of Ratcliffe's visit - and despite the threat against UK targets - Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson, said: "A lot of this kind of scare-story material is being published right now. Of course, it has nothing to do with reality and nothing to do with the intentions of the Russian Federation."

The intense scrutiny around the Ratcliffe trip and Russia's intentions comes amid a new report over shortfalls of missile interceptors in Europe.

The Associated Press says the US military is experiencing a "beyond critical" shortage of advanced missile interceptors in Europe largely driven by Donald Trump's war with Iran, according to a US defence official in Europe and a Nato official, raising concerns about vulnerabilities in Nato countries to a potential Russian attack.

11 →

Inside *28/08/26*
Four sections every day

News and Sport

War crimes
Ratko Mladić, 'the Butcher of Bosnia', dies while serving life for genocide
Page 24

Journal
Opinions and ideas

It's not just Farage: MPs must end their freebies for all
Frances Ryan
Page 1

Life & Arts
Features & interviews

Robert Carlyle
'When we did the Full Monty strip, the crowd reaction was terrifying!'
Page 3

Save up to 36% with a subscription to the Guardian and the Observer
Visit theguardian.com/paper-subs

Weather
Page 34

Quick crossword
Back of Life & Arts

Cartoon
Journal, page 4

Cryptic crossword
Back of Journal

Contact
For missing sections please fill out the form at **theguardian.com/missingsections** or call **0800 839 100**.
For individual departments, call the Guardian switchboard: **020 3353 2000**.
For the Readers' editor (corrections & clarifications on specific editorial content), call **020 3353 4736** to leave a voice message, or email **guardian.readers@theguardian.com**.
Letters for publication should be sent to **guardian.letters@theguardian.com**.

NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING
The recycled paper content of UK newspapers in 2025 was 30%

Guardian News & Media, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU. 020-3353 2000. Fax 020-7837 2114. In Manchester: Centurion House, 129 Deansgate, Manchester M3 3WR. Telephone Sales: 020-7611 9000. The Guardian lists links to third-party websites, but does not endorse them or guarantee their authenticity or accuracy. Back issues sold and provided by Historic Newspapers: historic-newspapers.co.uk/old-newspapers/guardian. Published by Guardian News & Media, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU, and at Centurion House, 129 Deansgate, Manchester M3 3WR. Printed at Newsprinters (Broxbourne) Ltd, Great Cambridge Road, Waltham Cross, EN8 8DY; Reach Oldham Ltd, Hollinwood Avenue, Chadderton, Oldham OL9 8EP; Discovery Print, 80 Kingsway East, Dundee DD4 8SL; and by Irish Times Print Facility, 4080 Kingswood Road, Citywest Business Campus, Dublin 24. No. 55,997, Friday 28 August 2026. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office ISSN 0261-3077. Secure Messaging digests: RcplC+ R8nXIx 4dLkDg 2XIQ; raCEIN kOzRAo vmkuGs jHUA

Undiagnosed PTSD after childbirth affects thousands of women – study

Denis Campbell
Health policy editor

Thousands of UK women are suffering from undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after childbirth every year, new research has found.

The frightening and dangerous condition is being missed in at least 15,000 women a year across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the true toll could be double that or more, according to the authors of research in a leading medical journal.

The gap in maternal mental health care is revealed in an evidence review today by doctors at the University of East Anglia's medical school who specialise in women's health.

Many GPs mistake PTSD for postnatal depression, which means women who urgently need specialist help for the former receive treatment that is not appropriate, it found.

The NHS's widespread failure to identify PTSD in women who recently had a child has prompted concern because undiagnosed mental ill health among them has been linked to relationship problems, long-term suffering and a high risk of suicide.

The research, published in the British Journal of General Practice, is the first attempt by experts to quantify how many cases of childbirth-related PTSD in the UK are diagnosed or not. The NHS does not collect such figures, despite the fact up to one in 16 mothers develops the serious mental health condition, often because they had a traumatic experience while giving birth.

The leader of the UK's 50,000 GPs admitted that cases of PTSD are going unrecognised and untreated because of "an important gap" in family doctors' ability to recognise the symptoms, which include nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety and persistent negative thoughts, including hopelessness.

▲ *PTSD symptoms in postnatal women include nightmares, anxiety, flashbacks and persistent negative thoughts* PHOTOGRAPH: ROOS KOOLE/GETTY

Research has estimated that either 5% or 5.9% of women giving birth suffer PTSD and also that fewer than half of those who get it are diagnosed and receive NHS care. In some cases it can occur even when the woman has had a medically uncomplicated birth.

"The Office for National Statistics figure for the 2025 live birth rate in England and Wales, not including Scotland and Northern Ireland, was 585,396. This figure does not include stillbirths and miscarriages, which are significant risk factors for childbirth-related PTSD," said Dr Megan Foreman, the lead author of the paper, who is also a GP.

"Therefore, at 5% of the 2025 ONS birth rate for England and Wales (29,269), combined with the evidence from Moran et al that less than 50% of women with PTSD symptoms postnatally are referred for specialist perinatal mental health support, a UK figure greater than 15,000 women, but potentially in the tens of thousands, would be justifiable based on the available evidence," she added.

Many cases of PTSD are being missed when new mothers go to see their GP for the NHS-wide checkup of their own and their baby's health six weeks after the birth, the six co-authors say.

That is particularly because, although there is NHS guidance on what should happen in those consultations, there is no approved framework for assessing women's risk of having PTSD.

15,000
The minimum estimated number of women giving birth each year whose PTSD is missed

The fact that six-week checks are meant to cover the health of newborns as well as their mothers, including immunisations the baby needs, means the child's situation can "dominate the consultation … [which] can make assessing the mother's mental health challenging, particularly if they attend alone with the child.

"In addition, some women may not feel able to discuss a traumatic birth immediately as it may be retriggering," the paper points out.

"A UK study demonstrated that, despite half of GPs recognising trauma-related features when reviewing case vignettes describing childbirth-related PTSD, their most common diagnosis was postnatal depression," it adds.

Misdiagnosis "can be detrimental" to women with PTSD because they are then prescribed antidepressants, which are not as effective for treating it as psychological therapy, and also because the evidence shows that "treating depression alone may not improve co-existing childbirth-related PTSD", the authors say.

Failure to correctly identify PTSD also matters because both it and postnatal depression increase the risk of suicide, which is the commonest cause of death among women in the year after giving birth.

"Untreated childbirth-related PTSD can have profound effects on women and families", including needing further NHS care, or avoiding contact with doctors and hospitals or choosing to have an elective caesarean or home birth with future pregnancies, the paper adds.

"This paper highlights an important gap in how we identify and support women experiencing PTSD following childbirth," said Prof Victoria Tzortziou Brown, the president of the Royal College of GPs.

Recognition of the condition is "vital", given the trauma involved, but the six-week check is not enough for a GP to adequately assess the woman's mental health, she added.

AI can detect heart disease in women by using breast screenings, study shows

Andrew Gregory
Health editor

Doctors have discovered a way to use routine mammograms that screen for breast cancer to spot heart disease, the world's leading – and frequently underdiagnosed – cause of death in women.

Researchers analysed the scans using artificial intelligence and were able to successfully identify women with coronary heart disease or high blood pressure, or who had suffered a stroke.

Experts said it meant breast screening for cancer could become dual-purpose, helping to flag women with heart disease and other cardiovascular problems, as well as spotting breast cancer early.

Millions of women are living with undetected heart disease. For decades, it has often been misdiagnosed or not picked up until the late stages of the disease.

Details of the breakthrough were presented in Munich at the European Society of Cardiology's annual congress, the world's largest heart conference. The implications are significant because hundreds of millions of women undergo mammograms every year.

Doctors in Israel examined 97,364 scans from 29,921 women, who had an average age of 54. By cross-referencing medical records, they found 16% of the women had high blood pressure, 2.5% had coronary heart disease, and 2.5% had experienced a stroke.

A machine-learning model was trained to identify women with these conditions and was able to reliably identify women who had suffered a stroke, based upon their mammogram alone, 86% of the time.

For high blood pressure and coronary heart disease it was 79% and 78% reliable at distinguishing between the women with the condition and those without.

The results were consistent regardless of age, or whether or not a woman also had cancer.

Dr Viana Copeland of Tel Aviv University presented the findings to delegates in Munich. "Despite being the leading cause of death in women worldwide, CVD [cardiovascular disease] is consistently underdiagnosed and undertreated," she said.

"A common finding in our medical centre, and around the world, is that when women do seek medical help, their CVD is already advanced. On the other hand, many women do attend routine breast cancer screening, even when they haven't sought care for cardiovascular symptoms."

86%
Degree of accuracy, based solely on mammograms, in identifying women who had suffered a stroke

Because mammography is already widely used, analysing breast scans for information about a woman's heart health "could potentially offer a scalable approach without requiring an additional imaging examination," Copeland added.

"Mammography also reaches many women in midlife, an important period for … cardiovascular risk."

Elena Arbelo, of the European Society of Cardiology, said the findings were "compelling". "A mammogram may one day do more than look for breast cancer – it may also offer a window on to cardiovascular health. That matters because CVD in women is still too often recognised late."

Dr Sonya Babu-Narayan, a consultant cardiologist and clinical director of the British Heart Foundation, a charity, also welcomed the breakthrough, adding: "When it comes to the heart, women are disproportionally unaware, unheard, underdiagnosed, undertreated and typically underrepresented in clinical research."

◀ Angela Rippon presenting Top Gear in 1978. Its recent team was Paddy McGuinness, Chris Harris and Andrew Flintoff, below left

▼ Matt LeBlanc, a presenter from 2016-19, outside St Paul's in 2016

PHOTOGRAPHS: BBC PHOTO LIBRARY; LEE BRIMBLE/PA; RON ZARAS/PA

Top Gear is to return – but who's in the driving seat?

Caroline Davies

The long-running motoring show Top Gear, which has been off air since its co-host Andrew "Freddie" Flintoff was seriously injured in a crash during filming almost four years ago, is to return to the BBC.

After Flintoff's accident at Dunsfold aerodrome in Surrey, the BBC said the series would be "rested" for the foreseeable future.

The BBC's director of entertainment, Ed Havard, confirmed the news of its return at a panel event at the Edinburgh TV festival yesterday. "There has been a lot of speculation about this and we can confirm that Top Gear is coming back," he said.

Havard refused to be drawn on who would host the popular show, amid reports that the comedian and presenter – and a known car enthusiast – Jimmy Carr was in the frame. "I'm not going to talk about talent today," he replied to questions. "Jimmy would be a great host but I won't be discussing that today."

Carr was a guest on Top Gear in 2004 and has said: "It's one of the biggest shows in the world. It's a global phenomenon."

The former England rugby player and Celebrity Traitors star Joe Marler is also reportedly being considered to host.

> ***'Jimmy Carr would be a great host, but I won't be discussing that today'***
>
> **Ed Havard**
> *Head of entertainment*

The model Jodie Kidd is another rumoured contender. Kidd has appeared on Top Gear, and after getting her racing licence began racing in Italy. She has also hosted various automotive shows including Channel 5's The Classic Car Show, Chubb Insurance's classic car podcast, and her own automotive YouTube channel, Kidd in a Sweet Shop.

The celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, who has appeared on Top Gear several times and owns an extensive collection of cars, has featured in speculation. Also in the frame is the actor Rowan Atkinson, another car enthusiast who appeared during series 17, where he set a lap time of 1:42.2, making him the fastest celebrity on the leaderboard at the time.

Top Gear began in 1977 and became one of the BBC's biggest hits in the hands of Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May in the 2000s.

▲ The show was a BBC hit when presented by Richard Hammond, Jeremy Clarkson and James May, who departed for Amazon Prime

▲ Rumoured hosts include Rowan Atkinson and the model Jodie Kidd

Clarkson's contract was not renewed at the end of the 22nd season, after he punched a producer. He later issued a formal apology. His co-hosts also left, with the trio signing up for another motoring show – the Amazon Prime series The Grand Tour.

They were replaced by the broadcaster Chris Evans and Friends star Matt LeBlanc. Evans left after just six episodes. The show also received criticism after LeBlanc and a rally driver performed "doughnuts" near the Cenotaph war memorial in London.

Flintoff, Paddy McGuinness and Chris Harris took over in 2018.

Flintoff was taken to hospital with facial and rib injuries after the Morgan Super 3 he was driving – an open-topped three-wheeled car – flipped upside down and skidded on the tarmac before coming to a stop. The BBC later reached a settlement, reportedly worth about £9m.

He has revealed he was deeply affected by the crash and did not leave his house for six months other than to attend medical appointments.

In the Disney + documentary Flintoff, released last year, he said he did not think he had it in him to "get through" after the accident. "I've got PTSD and I get anxious, for periods of time, I just find myself crying for no particular reason," he said.

Bronze age gold artefacts stolen in four-minute Spanish raid

Philip Oltermann

Thieves in Spain have raided the Treasure of Villena – a stunning collection of bronze age gold artefacts that has been described as the most important prehistoric trove in Europe – in the latest high-profile smash-and-grab heist on the continent.

▲ The items date back to 1000BC

The raid yesterday morning of the 66 mostly gold objects in the town of Villena, Alicante province, lasted just minutes, officials said.

"The alarm at the Villena Museum went off around 5.20am [4.20am BST]," a spokesperson for the town council said, adding that the thieves had left the building by 5.24am. The operation was "super-fast and super-professional", the spokesperson said.

His voice breaking, the mayor of Villena, Fulgencio Cerdán, said: "They've taken most of the treasure."

Local media said the few items the thieves had left behind included three silver vessels, a bracelet and some of the ornamentation of the *bastón del reyezuelo*, or kingfisher staff, a prehistoric ceremonial sceptre.

Cerdán said: "We are absolutely devastated. I'm even trembling. The truth is that for those of us from Villena, this destroys us. It's part of our heritage, of our wealth."

The treasure, which was discovered in 1963 by the archaeologist José María Soler in a vessel sunk in a dried-out riverbed in Villena, included 29 bracelets, 11 bowls, three bottles and other miscellaneous pieces dating back to about 1000BC.

Since May 2024, the hoard has been on display in a specially designated room in the newly opened, municipally owned Villena Museum. While the treasure's value is incalculable, the gold alone is worth about €1.7m (£1.5m), according to Cerdán.

The thieves arrived in several vehicles and apparently entered the museum through a window, said the Spanish government's deputy representative in Alicante, Manuel Pineda.

"All security systems were activated," according to the Villena spokesperson, who insisted there had been "no failure" by the museum.

Additional reporting
Agence France-Presse

Search on for at least 33 Britons missing after flash floods that killed hundreds

Rachel Hall

Rescue teams in Nepal are searching for at least 33 British nationals who are among those missing after flash floods ravaged its border with Tibet, killing at least 353 people.

The tour company Kailash Journeys confirmed it had not been able to account for seven UK nationals - five women and two men aged between 18 and 55 - travelling with it.

Another tour operator, the Trekkers' Society, said that among the British citizens who had been completing one of its tours to the sacred site of Mount Kailash were four males aged 14, 50, 50 and 54 and five women aged 40, 46, 50, 50 and 53.

The tour operator Alpine Eco Trek said a 13-year-old girl was among the missing British nationals and two Irish citizens were also missing. They were on a nine-day tour to Mount Kailash and crossing into Tibet from Nepal when they became trapped at the border as the flash floods struck.

Other missing British nationals with Alpine Eco Trek are three men aged 65, 64 and 52 and seven women aged 44, 47, 51, 60, 63, 63 and 65, according to travel logs.

The US tour company Himalayan Glacier told the BBC it had lost contact with a group of 47 guests, including two British citizens, who were en route to Mount Kailash. Fishtail Tours, a Nepali travel agency, said one British person was missing.

Andy Burnham has pledged an initial £5m in UK government support and offered to send emergency responders and rescue support to assist Nepal's disaster response efforts.

Speaking to journalists during a visit to south Wales, he said: "It's a devastating picture that is emerging from what has happened in Nepal. Scenes that we've never seen the like before, I don't think, certainly the scale of the devastation.

"So there is immediate action being taken. We are deploying consular support staff to the region so that British nationals will be able to access support 24/7.

"Obviously there are a number of British nationals who currently are thought to be missing and we'll be providing all the support we can to their families in what is a very distressing and devastating situation."

In a statement, the prime minister added: "In the past, Nepal has been there for Britain in our hour of need, and we will be there for Nepal in its hour of need right now."

King Charles said he and the queen were "heartbroken" and sent their "most profound sympathy" to those affected, adding: "Many in the United Kingdom have strong, deep and personal ties to this part of the world."

The president of the Nepal Centre for Disaster Management, Bishal Nath Upreti, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the flash floods were like a "tsunami from the sky". He said: "It's a huge debris, and in fact, after the 2015 earthquake, this is one of the largest disasters that we have [had] in Nepal."

He added: "It was such a huge amount of water. You can imagine it is 20m cubic metres excess water on the river … Villages and villages along the almost 40 to 50 kilometres were completely wiped out."

The Nepal tourism board said on Wednesday that 33 UK citizens were among the foreign nationals unaccounted for. At least three people had died in Tibet, according to China's state broadcaster, CCTV, while the Xinhua news agency said 558 people were unaccounted for in the region.

Rescuers are racing to locate people missing in the mountainous Rasuwa region, which borders China's autonomous region of Tibet and is popular with trekkers and pilgrims.

Pramod Poudel, from Uckfield, East Sussex, told the BBC that his wife, parents, brother and uncle had been caught in flash flooding. He said he would fly to Nepal last night to try to make contact with them.

Poudel said: "I guess there is no power so they can't charge their phones - to be honest, it's a very hard and difficult time at the moment."

In an emotional interview, he said: "I have seen pictures of where my home town used to be … and there is nothing there now."

The work and pensions secretary, Pat McFadden, told Times Radio the picture was "not completely clear yet", with "many, many more" people understood to be missing than those reported by the Nepali authorities, and no clear figures from China.

The Foreign Office said it was "deeply saddened by the loss of life and devastation caused by the floods in Nepal". It added: "British nationals in Nepal should follow local authority advice and exercise caution while travelling. For consular assistance call (+44) (0)207 008 5000 or (+977) (0)14237100."

Race to get aid to Nepal and Tibet as death toll from disaster nears 400

Continued *from page 1*

Videos from Wednesday's disaster showed a massive wall of water crashing down on the border as people tried to flee. The power, volume and speed of the floods gave little time for escape.

Trucks were overturned and houses, roads and power plants were swept away in Nepal, while officials in Tibet said they feared "major casualties" after a mudslide hit a border crossing.

Tom Fletcher, the UN's humanitarian chief, described the flood as "horrifying". He said emergency teams had been mobilised and an initial $2m (£1.5m) of disaster funds allocated to cover emergency medical care, shelter and water.

Nepal's disaster authority warned of continuing danger yesterday, appealing to residents and rescuers to stay away from a swelling lake that had formed at the flood site. Chinese authorities said a barrier lake at the confluence of the Tsogyal and Purupqiangzangbu rivers was overflowing and could burst.

Girilal Budhathoki, 36, who lives in the Rasuwa district of Nepal's Bagmati province, said that the flood waters had swept away his wife and four children while he was away from the family home.

"A huge surge of water came," he said. "Everything turned completely black, and I couldn't understand what was happening. Suddenly, something heavy crushed me and I fell down."

▲ *Aid is loaded on to an Indian air force plane at a base in Ghaziabad*

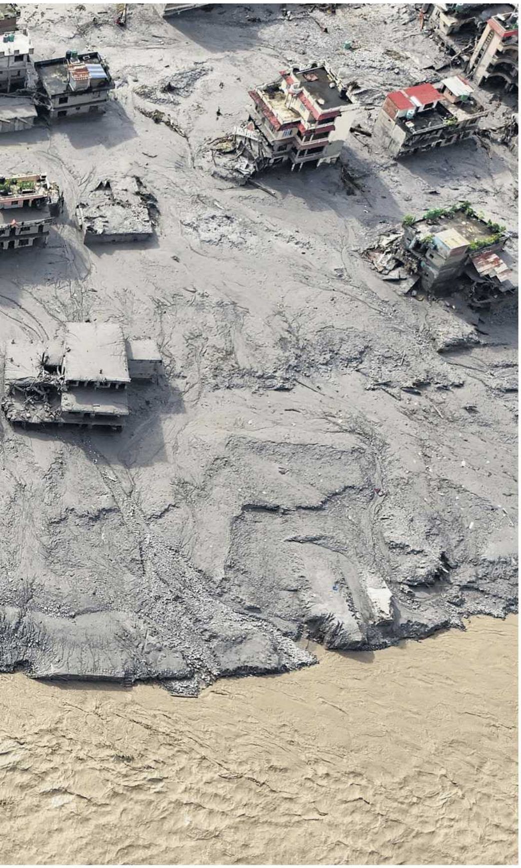
Budhathoki realised what had happened only when he returned to the place where his house had stood. "I searched desperately for my wife and children but I couldn't find them," he said. "They didn't make it out. My wife was swept away too. I am all alone now."

Kamal Kharel, who works at a hydropower plant in Chilime, also in Rasuwa district, was in the office when the floods hit. "The whole place shook as if there had been a huge earthquake," he said. "But when I went outside, I saw everything, a storm and raging water."

Kharel and some of his colleagues managed to climb a hill, where they stayed until they were rescued by the army yesterday morning. He said: "I had never seen waves crashing that high. You only see waves like that in the sea."

People from the hard-hit districts of Nuwakot and Dhading, in Bagmati province, were seen gathering outside an army training centre - the base for helicopter rescue operations - seeking information about missing family members.

Police were recording the names of



▲ *Clockwise from main image: a drone view of mud-covered buildings at Trishuli in Nepal yesterday; a policeman with a rescue dog in Devighat; relatives of flood victims at an army centre in Devighat; soldiers rescue a man from the mud; displaced survivors in Trishuli*

PHOTOGRAPHS: NAVESH CHITRAKAR/REUTERS; NIRANJAN SHRESTHA/AP; NARENDRA SHRESTHA/EPA

the missing outside the barracks gate. Mobile phone torches were their only source of light as the area remained without electricity because of damaged hydroelectric infrastructure.

The village of Soley, in Nuwakot, which had about 25 homes, was almost wiped out, according to Niranjan Paudyal, a Kathmandu-based journalist whose parents and other relatives lived there. Desperate for information, he had travelled to the area yesterday for news of his family. "There is no update till now," he said. "I fear there won't be any update."

More than 500 foreigners were among 826 people missing in Nepal, police and tourism officials said. Among those unaccounted for were 177 from India, 90 from the US, 34 from Australia, 33 from Britain and 25 from Canada.

Chinese state media said at least 558 people were missing on the Tibet side of the border, of whom at least 260 were foreign nationals.

Police in Nepal said 359 bodies had been recovered by yesterday afternoon local time, while Chinese state media reported three dead on the Tibet side of the border. Many of the victims were on a pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar, a high-altitude site in Tibet revered by Hindus and Buddhists, among others.

Early reports from Nepali officials suggested an earthquake could have caused the lower part of a glacier to collapse and trigger the floods. But the US Geological Survey later said what was initially reported as a 4.4-magnitude earthquake was a seismic shock generated by glacial rock and ice collapsing, and the flow of debris. "No earthquake had occurred," it said.

Srijana Gurung, the acting Nepal director for the international NGO Plan International, said communities across the Himalayan country were facing "climate shock after shock" with hardly any time to recover.

> *'I searched for my wife and children but I couldn't find them. They didn't make it out. I am all alone now'*
>
> **Girilal Budhathoki, 36**
> *Bagmati province, Nepal*

"Floods and landslides have always happened in Nepal, but the climate crisis is making them far more frequent and intense," she said. "The priority now must be reaching those affected, supporting families searching for loved ones and ensuring vulnerable communities have the assistance they need."

Gurung said children and families who had lost their homes and livelihoods would be in urgent need of medical help, food, shelter and hygiene kits. "There is also a risk of waterborne disease as access to clean water and sanitation is likely to have been damaged," she said.

Scant information has emerged from Chinese officials about the scale of the destruction. Tibet is the most tightly controlled part of China even under normal circumstances. Foreign journalists cannot visit unless they are part of a government-controlled tour, and officials have cracked down harshly on calls for greater autonomy. Tibetans have almost no contact with the international media because of fears of retribution.

Only brief, state-controlled media reports about the floods have been allowed to circulate in China and the authorities have confirmed only three deaths. Chinese reports have focused on rescue efforts.

Maya Wang, the deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, wrote on X: "The floods raise questions about whether Chinese authorities could've done more to reduce disaster risks, given longstanding concerns from Tibetan diaspora groups & experts about rapid, state-led development in areas where Tibetans have little say."

She called on Beijing to "allow Tibetans access to information and international researchers and journalists unfettered access to the region, and conduct a rigorous investigation into the disaster".

Additional reporting **Amy Hawkins**

A child at an army camp being used as a centre for people rescued from floods in Nuwakot, Nepal
PHOTOGRAPH: NAVESH CHITRAKAR/REUTERS

'A serious threat'

More flash floods inevitable as globe heats, say experts

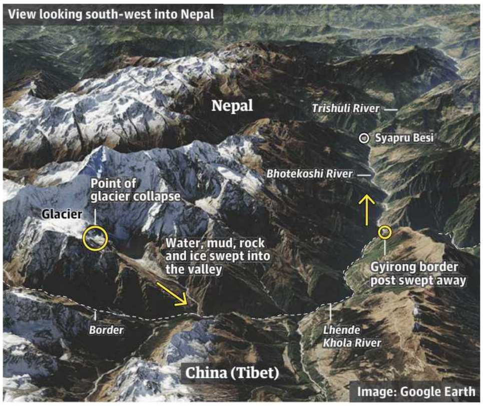
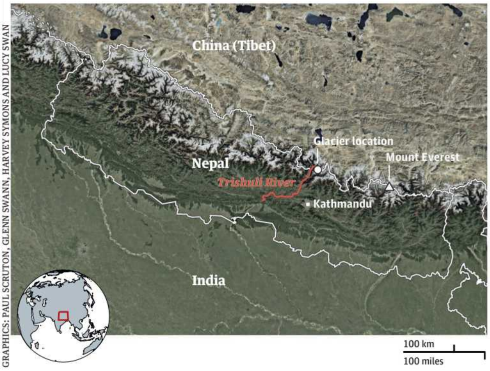

View looking south-west into Nepal
Nepal
Trishuli River
Syapru Besi
Bhotekoshi River
Point of glacier collapse
Glacier
Water, mud, rock and ice swept into the valley
Gyirong border post swept away
Border
Lhende Khola River
China (Tibet)

Image: Google Earth



GRAPHICS: PAUL SCRUTON, GLENN SWANN, HARVEY SYMONS AND LUCY SWAN

Jonathan Watts

The devastating flash flood that ripped through the border communities of Nepal and Tibet has heightened fears that the climate crisis is destabilising the geology of mountain and polar regions, threatening to affect millions of people.

Satellite imagery suggests a glacier collapse high in the Himalayas was the primary cause of the deadly torrent of mud, water and ice that tore along the Bhotekoshi River on Wednesday. It swept away buildings and roads and left at least 360 people dead and 1,400 missing.

A magnitude 4.4 earthquake was initially blamed for the collapse. However, it is now thought to have been caused by the huge wall of ice that crashed down on to the north slope of Langtang Lirung, a 7,000-metre (23,000ft) mountain, the impact of which registered a magnitude of 5.2.

"Additional analysis of long-period seismic waves indicates that the seismic energy was instead generated by a glacial collapse and debris flow," the US Geological Survey said.

The ice-rock avalanche pushed boulders and other debris into the Lhende Khola River, a tributary of the Bhotekoshi. Water levels in rivers downstream rose by between 7 and 9 metres within 30 minutes, according to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.

Scientists were yesterday still examining the precise mechanics of the Himalayan disaster, but many observed that glaciers and permafrost around the world are being weakened by global heating, caused by the burning of gas, oil and coal.

The detachment of a chunk of the glacier wall came amid unusual heat that was likely to have melted the ice that bound the splintered bedrock together.

Two days before the collapse, the ground temperature hit its highest point in the past two years, according to Dr Hamish Pritchard, a glaciologist with the British Antarctic Survey, whose team had sensors 6 miles away from the site.

"These high temperatures would have weakened the snowpack, filled crevasses with water and thawed the bonds between ice and rock that hold these glaciers in place," Pritchard told the Science Media Centre.

A series of intense heatwaves has hit the region since early this year and has affected countries around the world. Another factor here was the monsoon season, which saturated the soil and swelled rivers. In 2023 the UN's top scientific advisory body warned that previously ice-bound landmasses - from permafrost tundra to mountain glaciers - would become increasingly unstable as temperatures rose.

"Every increment of warming will multiply and intensify future hazards from cryosphere regions," observed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its sixth synthesis report. "Floods, landslides and freshwater shortages from glacier retreat and snow loss pose a serious threat to mountain regions."

Average global temperatures are nudging closer to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. Even faster warming is occurring in alpine and polar regions.

Dr Richard Waller, a senior lecturer in physical geography at Keele University, said: "The progressive loss of snow and glacier ice results in the surface being less reflective, so it absorbs more solar energy and heats up. In combination with atmospheric warming, this is leading to the melting of mountain permafrost."

The thaw is altering the shape, colour and solidity of the landscape, creating or expanding glacial meltwater lakes and, in the long term, threatening the origin of many rivers and the drinking supplies of populations downstream. In many parts of Asia hundreds of millions of people depend on the rivers, such as the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, that descend from the glaciers.

Scientists have high confidence that glacier retreat around the world is caused by human-driven global heating. This has caused glacier collapses from the Alps to the Andes. In the Langtang catchment area in Nepal, glacier loss rates have increased more than fourfold since 1964, a study showed.

As glacier weakening accelerates, Pritchard called for greater disaster preparedness. "More avalanches and more floods are inevitable, particularly as lakes grow in front of the retreating glaciers," he said. "Early warning systems are urgently needed to protect the people living in these valleys."

Former teacher found guilty of indecent assaults of male teenage pupils in 1980s

Caroline Davies

A chemistry teacher was found guilty yesterday of indecently assaulting two teenage pupils at an all-boys school in the late 1980s.

Sally-Anne Bowen, who taught at Christ's College in Finchley, north London, assaulted the boys when they were aged around 14 to 15 and she was in her mid-20s.

Bowen, of Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, did not show any emotion as a jury at Harrow crown court returned majority verdicts finding the 65-year-old guilty of seven counts of indecent assault, after more than six hours of deliberations.

One complainant told jurors he had had sex with the teacher "about 20 or 30 times" over several months. He would visit Bowen's home, considered her to be his girlfriend and had fallen in love, the court heard.

In his evidence the man - who for legal reasons cannot be named - said he had kept their relationship secret because he felt compelled to "protect" the teacher, who had "drummed it" into him that he was not allowed to tell anyone.

"I never, ever spoke to anyone about it," he said. "I was always really aware, she drummed it into me." He added: "Years she got to teach because I remained silent."

He said in a police interview that the experience had been "the destruction of my education".

Madeleine Wolfe, prosecuting, had told jurors in her closing speech that the man's evidence had "a real visceral quality to it", adding: "There can be no doubt that there was a lasting impact on him. It's not a schoolboy fantasy, is it?"

It had not been until the man became a parent himself that he began to realise what had happened to him, Wolfe said.

The second complainant said he and Bowen had kissed once in a cafe when he had been "goaded" into it by other boys.

▲ *Sally-Anne Bowen, 65, taught chemistry at Christ's College boys' school in Finchley in the 1980s*

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES MANNING/PA

Another former pupil at the school, Tobias Oliver, said Bowen had acted like she was in "a Sabrina Carpenter video" in the classroom, and "dressed and behaved more like my teenage female friends".

Oliver, who did not know the two victims, told jurors: "The topics of conversation in class often strayed away from chemistry and became quite sexual." Bowen "felt more like trying to be one of us, like our friend, than a teacher", he said. Bowen had been "very flirtatious" in class and told them how she enjoyed giving oral sex to her boyfriend, he said.

> ***'I never spoke about it. Years she got to teach because I remained silent'***
>
> **Complainant**
> *Speaking in court*

He recalled an occasion when a boy in Bowen's class was reading a "sex manual", which he believed to be the Kama Sutra. He said Bowen had gone through the book and discussed "the merits of different sexual positions" with the students.

Oliver also described how, on another occasion, Bowen had sat on a desk and caught the attention of the class before slowly opening her legs, revealing her underwear.

Richard Luker, head of science at the school in the late 1980s, told the court he remembered a complaint from the first victim's mother that she was concerned the boy was planning to travel abroad with Bowen at the end of term.

During the trial, Bowen claimed the allegations were "total fabrication". She said she had had a medical condition which, in the late 1980s, had not been diagnosed and had made sexual intercourse difficult and painful for her. Her partner of 36 years, Darren Scotchbrook, giving evidence, said she had not been aware of her condition when they met in 1990, and sex had been "clearly not enjoyable for her" as a result.

Asked how she had dressed in the classroom, Bowen replied that she "wasn't going to dress like Margaret Thatcher" in her mid-20s. She told the court she "didn't flirt with students" and was "just friendly".

She denied having a relationship with the first complainant, saying: "Absolutely not, no relationship whatsoever. Student-teacher." She denied knowing the second complainant.

Bowen was granted bail until her sentence hearing on 20 November.

Peter Cullen, voice of Eeyore and Optimus Prime, dies

Nadeem Badshah

Peter Cullen, the actor behind the voice of characters including Eeyore in Disney's Winnie the Pooh franchise and Optimus Prime in Transformers, has died aged 85.

He died on Wednesday at his home in Los Angeles, a statement said.

The Canadian actor began his biggest role - as Optimus Prime, the honourable leader of the Autobots - for the Transformers TV series in 1984. He returned for seven Hollywood films from 2007 to 2023 and other spin-offs.

He voiced the melancholic donkey Eeyore in The New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh from the late 1980s as well as numerous related shows, films and games.

Cullen's other notable roles included the roars of King Kong for the 1976 remake, and Karr - short for Knight Automated Roving Robot and the evil counterpart to Kitt - in the Knight Rider series in 1982 and 2009.

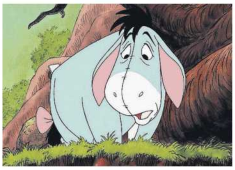
His family said: "Peter Cullen passed away peacefully, surrounded by his loving family - and held in the hearts of his many friends and countless fans worldwide.

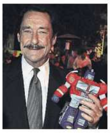
"His family asks that you honour his remarkable legacy by serving your communities and leading others with compassion, integrity, and loyalty and always remember, 'be strong enough to be gentle'."

The Montreal-born actor began his career on Canadian TV and radio and was then a regular on programmes including The Sonny & Cher Show before deciding to concentrate on voice acting.

Cullen has said Optimus Prime's resonant voice was inspired by his brother Larry, a retired captain in the US Marine Corps, who suggested he should play the character as "a real hero, don't be a Hollywood hero".

The actor's performance earned him a Daytime Emmy nomination for outstanding performer in an animated programme in 2011, and he was honoured with a lifetime achievement award at the Children's & Family Emmy Awards in 2023.





◀ *Peter Cullen's most famous roles were as Optimus Prime in Transformers, and Winnie the Pooh's friend Eeyore, above*

Hackers access data of 8.7m customers, airports firm says

Lauren Almeida

Manchester, London Stansted and East Midlands airports have been hit by a cyber-attack in which hackers accessed the data of about 8.7 million customers.

The incident involved data related to "car park, lounge and fast-track bookings and in-airport wifi sign-ups", and the hackers obtained email addresses, phone numbers, vehicle registrations and postcodes, said Manchester Airports Group (MAG), which operates the three hubs.

The company said that "at no point has passenger safety or aviation security been compromised" during the incident and operations at the airports were unaffected. The hacked system did not hold customers' bank or payment details.

In an email to customers, London Stansted said: "We would urge you to be particularly cautious of unexpected emails, calls or text messages claiming to be from us.

"We will never contact you unexpectedly to ask for payment or banking information. We apologise for any inconvenience or concern this may cause."

The cyber-attack hit the airports during peak summer travel season. Many families are flying back into the UK this week before the start of the new school year. Fifty-four million passengers flew through Manchester, London Stansted and East Midlands airports combined last year.

An MAG spokesperson said the company had "immediately contained the risk" from the incident and was "working with specialist advisers and taking appropriate steps to protect our customers and systems".

"We have informed and are working with the relevant authorities," they said. "Operations remain unaffected and customer parking services continue normally."

Lauren Wills-Dixon, a partner at the law firm Gordons, said the scale of the attack was notable. "Airports sell a number of services including lounge access, parking and fast-track bookings. Wifi access also requires customers to input their data," she said. "As a result, operators will hold large amounts of customer data and this, together with the increased use of technology, only increases the threat of a cyber-attack."

The incident comes as pressure grows on suppliers and operators of national infrastructure to improve their defences.

Flights were delayed and cancelled last year at three major European airports - including Heathrow - after the company behind the software used for check-in and boarding said it had been hit by a cyber-attack.

There was a wave of high-profile cyber-attacks against British companies last year and one resulted in the closure of Jaguar Land Rover's operations for several weeks.

Britain expects Meta to match child safety measures of US settlement

Robert Booth
UK technology editor

The government expects the Instagram owner Meta to introduce the same protections for children in Britain as those it agreed in the US on Wednesday as part of a court settlement that could cost the company up to $18bn (£13bn).

Pat McFadden, the work and pensions secretary, said yesterday he did not want young people in the US to have "a higher rate of protection" than those in Britain, after Meta settled a lawsuit brought by dozens of US states accusing the company of harming children.

As well as the payouts, Meta agreed to a default daily time limit of two hours for users under 18 that can be lifted only by a parent – a measure not currently proposed under plans to ban social media for under-16s in Britain – and a default block between midnight and 6am for under-18s, as well as default blocks on user notifications at night and during school.

Analysts have pointed out the measures largely fall within the bounds of changes Meta has already been required to make elsewhere. But restrictions agreed in the US that have not been proposed in Britain include bans on under-18s displaying numbers of likes or reactions and on cosmetic procedure image filters.

Meta has urged TikTok and YouTube to adopt the same standards "to ensure teens use social media in a healthy and responsible way".

Asked on Sky News whether he expected Meta to put in place the new features in Britain, McFadden said: "Yes, we would. We don't want a situation where young people in America have got a higher rate of protection than young people in the UK."

In June, Keir Starmer's government announced an Australia-style ban on social media for children under 16 would come into force by early 2027. It also said in July that default overnight curfews from midnight to 6am would be switched on for 16- and 17-year-olds using social media apps, while features designed to keep users scrolling for longer would be switched off by default.

McFadden said the social media ban for young people would come into force next year, confirmed the overnight curfews and added: "We've got to do something about this endless scrolling, which is so addictive for young people."

Countries around the world are beginning to restrict children's access to social media amid rising concern. In March, Indonesia began blocking children under 16 from most social media. Malaysia followed suit in June. France passed a law banning social media access for under-15s in July, while Turkey passed a bill with similar restrictions. Bans or limits are being considered by 19 other countries, according to the Tech Policy Press non-profit organisation.

The Meta settlement announced on Wednesday cut short a trial in California in which lawyers for 29 US states accused Meta of covering up internal research showing that Instagram was addictive for teenagers. Legal experts, including James Grimmelmann, a professor of digital and information law at Cornell University, described the settlement as "a sign of vulnerability on Meta's part". It prompted calls for the UK government to tighten its grip on social media firms after critics said the 2023 Online Safety Act, enforced by Ofcom, had had limited effect.

The Molly Rose Foundation, set up by the father of Molly Russell, who took her own life in 2017 after falling into a vortex of despair on social media, called on the government to "seize this opportunity to deliver a reset to children's online safety".

"Andy Burnham has now seen that it is possible to take on big tech to address drivers of online harm," a spokesperson said. "It's time for the UK government to be brave, bold and decisive in ways it hasn't been before."

Munira Wilson, who leads on children and families for the Liberal Democrats, said: "If a US court can pressure Meta into making significant changes to its platforms, why is our government still relying on optional curfews, strongly worded statements and unworkable bans?"

Meanwhile, experts were sceptical that Meta's agreed measures would tackle the underlying problems with compulsive – some say addictive – app design.

Dr Rachael Kent, a senior lecturer in digital economy and society education at King's College London, said the settlement "does not fundamentally redesign the engagement-driven model. Some of the measures being introduced do not remove many of the underlying engagement mechanisms altogether – infinite scroll, autoplay and algorithmic recommendation remain – but introduce limits and stopping points around them."

▲ *Mark Zuckerberg at the California courthouse where the trial took place*

Wider impact

Facebook case raises hopes across other countries

Aisha Down

▲ *Parents protest with pictures of their deceased children outside the court in Oakland, California*

PHOTOGRAPH: NOAH BERGER/AP

In October 2021, Abrham Meareg's father, a professor of chemistry in the northern city of Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, was shot at close range and died in front of his family home seven hours later.

This was in the middle of the country's civil war. For weeks, Facebook's algorithm had actively promoted posts calling for the academic to be murdered, according to Meareg and Foxglove, a nonprofit organisation supporting his lawsuit against the company in Kenya. These posts included photos of his father and his home address.

tradingref.com

Meareg filed the lawsuit in 2022. He said he repeatedly asked Facebook to remove the posts, and the company did nothing. Nearly four years later, the case has still not been heard. Meta, Facebook's parent company, has "fought tooth and nail to avoid responsibility," said Foxglove.

"It's a matter of numbers to them, a matter of statistics," Meareg said. "It has been proven multiple times that our lives do not matter to them."

▲ *Abrham Meareg blames Meta for the murder of his father in 2021*

This week Meta settled a lawsuit brought by 29 US states that argued it designed addictive products that hook young people. The company agreed to pay $18bn (£13bn) and to change certain features in the US. It was a victory that would make "a world of difference for children and their families", said California's attorney general.

But elsewhere in the world, in jurisdictions as far-flung as Amsterdam and Nairobi, other claims have yet to be heard. Far bigger questions about the power of a single US company to shape politics and democracy everywhere on earth are still to be answered.

For the US, the settlement is a victory. A jury has done what the US Congress could not – put controls on a powerful tech company.

For Meta, the settlement is also a victory. Its share price rose in the hours after the deal was announced; its chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, was not forced to testify. The sum it is to pay is far less than the states had sought – $200bn – or the amount Meta itself had suggested in a court filing it might have to pay, up to $1.4tn.

For the rest of the world, however, the picture is more mixed. The limits Meta will put on its US platform are, in large part, similar to limits Britain and Australia have already achieved through regulation.

There are certain concessions it has now made that other governments might also demand: for example, while Britain now bans under-16s from social media platforms, it may also wish Meta to impose a default daily use limit of two hours for under-18s, which is what the company has agreed to in the US.

The central issue of Meareg's case is Meta's algorithm. This is the system that decides what content to show users of Facebook and Instagram. Meareg's suit rests on the claim that this algorithm promoted the posts that called for the death of his father, and that Facebook's sparse moderation in east Africa did almost nothing to prevent this.

In Kenya, the high court recently ruled that Meareg's case against Meta could go ahead, despite years of legal manoeuvring from the company to prevent it. It could now be heard in the next year.

"Meta's lawyers have spent years trying to prevent this important case being heard, thankfully without success. We hope that the news from the US is a sign that Mark Zuckerberg's time is finally up," said Rosa Curling, Foxglove's co-executive director.

Meta declined to respond to questions about Meareg's case. Meareg said he believed that Meta expected him to give up.

"They don't know how I am determined for justice. It is the thing you do for the person you love. If you love someone – and I loved my dad from my heart – then he needs justice. He needs a public apology. There has to be accountability."

◀ *People lay flowers at the house, above, in Grangetown, Teesside, where a woman and her niece were killed in a house fire*

PHOTOGRAPHS: OWEN HUMPHREYS/PA

Teesside MPs issue appeal for more police resources after house fire and A66 deaths

Mark Brown
North of England correspondent

Five Teesside MPs have called on the government to provide more help to local police and fire services after a week in which nine people died.

The MPs said the communities they represented "deserve to feel safe" and they should get the "strongest possible backing from the government". The joint statement comes after two fatal incidents that police have said may be linked to organised crime.

On Saturday seven people, including two police officers, were killed in a head-on crash on the A66.

On Wednesday a 34-year-old woman and her seven-year-old niece were killed in a house fire that police believe was started deliberately. The house in Grangetown is less than a mile from the A66 crash.

Andy McDonald, the Labour MP for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East, said gangs and the drug trade were "clearly featuring" in a series of incidents in the area.

Cleveland police, he said, had been underfunded for many years. He told BBC Radio 4: "We do suffer those metropolitan levels of crime, and yet comparatively our funding looks much more like a rural area, and it simply cannot continue like that.

"We've got to put resources where the demand is most high, and that is Cleveland, and that's the message to ministers."

Alec Brown, the Labour leader of Redcar and Cleveland council, said people deserved to "feel safe".

▲ *Tributes left for Valentina Foster, seven, and Natalie McDonald, 34*

The prime minister, Andy Burnham, said ministers would offer "all of the support that the authorities need". On a visit to south Wales, he said it was "too early to jump to conclusions" about whether the fire and the A66 crash were connected.

"The important thing [is], it's a terribly tragic event that's happened, with the loss of a young woman and her seven-year-old niece … Utterly devastating. I'm sure there's a whole community that is grieving."

The calls came as inquests were formally opened into the deaths of the seven people who died in the A66 crash. The two police officers who died were PC Matthew Blades, 37, and PC Tom Clough, 38.

The coroner, Paul Appleton, said that in the early hours of 22 August there was a collision on the A66 at South Bank between a police vehicle and a Volkswagen Passat. He told the hearing that "all occupants of both vehicles were sadly pronounced dead at the scene".

Appleton said: "At this stage it is understood there had been a police pursuit of the Volkswagen Passat. It entered the A66 carriageway against the flow of traffic, at which stage the pursuit was aborted. A short time after … the VW Passat collided with a police vehicle which had not been directly involved in the prior pursuit."

He said the provisional cause of death for Blades was head and neck injuries, and the provisional cause of death for Clough was neck injuries.

Later inquests were opened and adjourned into the deaths of the Passat occupants, named as Cole Worthy, 17, Theo Rae, 17, Makai Saddington, 18, and Michael Robert Cahill and Jacob Matusiak, both 23.

The victims of the house fire have been named as Natalie McDonald and her niece Valentina Foster.

Local residents insisted their deaths had had nothing to do with the A66 crash.

McDonald's brother Josh Kirton told reporters: "My sister was not involved with anything to do with gangs, or the [crash on the] A66. That's what makes this so senseless.

"There's some terrible people in the world and now my sister and Valentina have gone."

Cleveland police have arrested two men, aged 23 and 31, on suspicion of murder in connection with the blaze. They remained in police custody last night.

Police also released details about two other crimes in the local area but have not said if they could be linked.

One is a report of a vehicle crashing into a wall at an empty property in South Bank, near Middlesbrough, early yesterday. The other is an assault with a bladed weapon in Eston yesterday.

The five MPs - Andy McDonald, Chris McDonald, Luke Myer, Jonathan Brash and Anna Turley - said they had met the policing and fire minister to discuss local pressures.

"These pressures did not emerge overnight," they said. "They have built up over many years and were made significantly worse by the savage cuts during the austerity period."

Trump golf course attack: Seven face charges with 'terrorist' link

Haroon Siddique
Legal affairs correspondent

Seven people charged with vandalising Donald Trump's Turnberry golf course in Scotland have been accused of malicious damage "having a terrorist connection".

The clubhouse at the five-star Trump Turnberry hotel and resort was graffitied on 8 March last year and the course was dug up and painted with the words "Gaza is not 4 sale".

Kieran Robson, 35, Uzma Bashir, 56, Ricky Southall, 34, Autumn Taylor Ward, 22, Rebecca Sian Davies, 29, John Moxley, 58, and Dylan Chiaramello, 24, are due to appear in court on 31 August. The indictment alleges they "did maliciously dig up turf on the golf course, spray glyphosate or similar substance on the fairways and greens, spray a building and signpost with paint, paint political and offensive slogans on the grass, score a political slogan into the turf, paint political and offensive slogans on a building, walls and pillars, damage a sprinkler system causing flooding, and damage a light". It adds that it will be proved "that the aforesaid offence was aggravated by reason of having a terrorist connection".

A note of a meeting on 13 March 2025 between the Scottish first minister, John Swinney, and the US president's son Eric Trump, said it "noted with concern the recent incident … condemning the damage caused by vandalism and offered reassurance that the relevant authorities would continue to take the incident seriously".

In Scotland, unlike in England, a jury, not a judge, will determine at trial whether there is a terrorist connection.

Stephen King series comes to north London

PA Media

Stephen King's London-set horror short story Crouch End will be adapted into a "cinematic" and "thought-provoking" TV series.

Named after and set in the north London area, the six-part Prime Video series is based on the author's tale, which was first published in 1980.

It also marks the first King adaptation to be produced in the UK.

The series follows global film star Doris Freeman, who claims to police that a strange phenomena is behind the disappearance of her husband.

The series is being adapted by Bodies screenwriter Paul Tomalin, who said it was a "dream come true" and an "honour" to adapt the short story for TV. He said: "After reading Crouch End some years back, Stephen King's vivid prose has haunted my nightmares ever since."

The international best-selling US author has been dubbed the "king of horror" for penning a number of horror fiction novels, many of which have been adapted for the screen, including Carrie, It, and The Shining.

Number of asylum seekers in hotels halved in a year, new figures show

Jessica Elgot
Diane Taylor
Chris Osuh

The number of asylum seekers living in hotels has halved in a year, Home Office figures show.

Sweeping changes to the asylum system have also led to a significant drop in legal arrivals and asylum claims, but the numbers of asylum seekers housed in private accommodation has increased as the government moves people from hotels into privately rented houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).

There were 16,021 asylum seekers housed in 160 hotels at the end of June, down from 32,041 at the same point last year and a peak of 56,018 in September 2023.

Asylum hotels have been a flashpoint for the far right, and the government has pledged to end their use by the end of the parliament. It said earlier this month another 13 hotels had recently been exited.

But tens of thousands of people are still housed in other forms of contingency accommodation, which has also often been highly controversial, both in local communities and because of the conditions of the housing for a vulnerable group of people. The latest figures show 69,038 were housed in temporary accommodation.

The shift from asylum hotels to other forms of accommodation has led to an 8% fall in Home Office spending on asylum.

The Guardian revealed this month that the government was considering paying higher prices for housing asylum seekers in private rental properties as part of Andy Burnham's plan to spread accommodation more evenly across the country.

The home secretary, Shabana Mahmood, said figures showed the government was "restoring control at our border and fairness to the migration system".

She said: "A little over two years into office and the asylum backlog is down, the number of asylum seekers in hotels is falling, illegal working arrests are at record levels and deportations and returns are up markedly."

Small boat crossings have fallen by 23% year on year, which Home Office officials said was down to a combination of more trafficking arrests and more interceptions by French police.

The previous prime minister, Keir Starmer, struck a deal with the French government to deport some would-be migrants back to France in exchange for providing others with a safe and legal route to the UK, known as the one in, one out policy.

However, Home Office figures show the introduction of the scheme has led to a rise in incidents of use of force against deportees to a record 210, including 181 occasions where restraint equipment was used, a figure that has doubled since the start of the French scheme.

Charities say they have documented injuries sustained by asylum seekers as they are removed.

Mahmood said there was still more to do to deter small boat Channel crossings. "Small boats numbers are now falling, but we are not complacent and there is more we must do," she said. "That is why I have boosted enforcement on the French beaches and overseas and introduced new legislation to tackle the pull factors that draw people here through unsafe and illegal routes."

Nuni Jorgensen, of the University of Oxford's Migration Observatory, told the Press Association the government had been able to close hotels largely because asylum decisions were being made more quickly, but there was now an asylum appeals backlog in the courts.

Figures also show that the number of businesses being stripped of the right to sponsor migrant workers has surged to the highest since the post-Brexit scheme was introduced.

Analysis of statistics and a freedom of information request by the Work Rights Centre charity found the number of revocations of licences to sponsor migrant workers surged to 4,403 in the 12 months to June 2026, from 1,828 in 2025.

The skilled worker visa sponsorship scheme was introduced to fill post-Brexit skills shortages in sectors such as care. Unions and charities have warned that the scheme facilitates exploitation.

In some cases, workers have complained of employers using the fact that their migration status is tied to their job to underpay them and force them to work long hours. Others, such as Shabin Shaji, whose case the Guardian reported on this year, paid cash to recruiters to secure a role in the UK but have been left destitute after their employer "ghosted" them.

▲ *Shabana Mahmood welcomed the figures, and promised to go further*

Burnham backed political donations cap 'that reduced over time' before U-turn

Kiran Stacey
Policy editor

Andy Burnham recently supported a lower cap on political donations than previously reported, according to correspondence seen by the Guardian, as the row over next week's elections bill escalates.

The prime minister wrote to a campaigner in May outlining his support for a £500,000 individual donations cap, which he said would "guard against the perception of any one party being unduly influenced or swayed by one person or organisation".

In a follow-up email, Burnham went on to say he believed the cap should gradually be reduced – a proposal now being put forward by the Labour MP Stella Creasy.

Campaigners are accusing Burnham of a U-turn after the Guardian reported the prime minister had decided not to back the attempts by Creasy and others to introduce a donations cap in next week's elections bill.

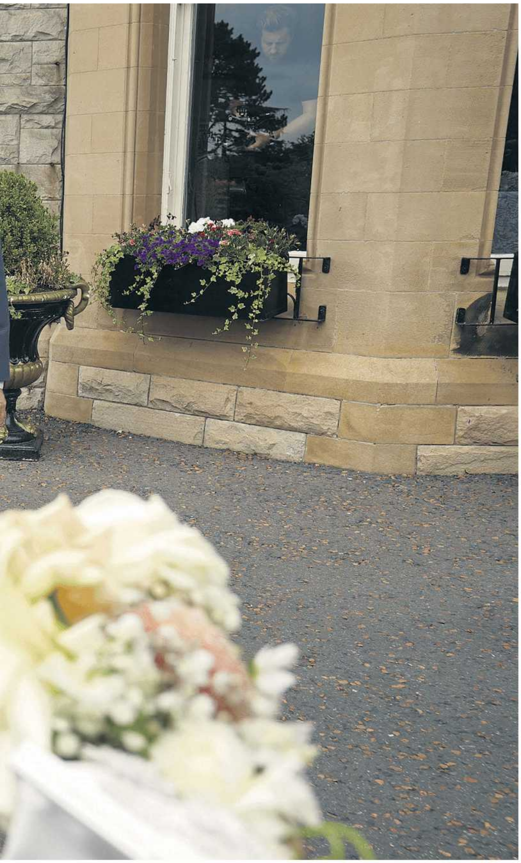
In a message to Shaun Bowler, who runs the website cleanupgb.co.uk, Burnham wrote: "I do think there should be a cap on political donations. This would guard against the perception of any one party being unduly influenced or swayed by one person or organisation.

"As to the level, I think that would have to be subject to wider review of political funding but my gut feeling would suggest somewhere in the region of £500k."

In a second message, the then would-be MP for Makerfield said: "[I] would definitely want to see that reduced over time. I am in complete agreement that there needs to be wholesale culture change in Westminster."

Bowler has now written to the prime minister accusing

◀ *Labour MP Stella Creasy has proposed a £500,000 cap on political donations, falling to £100,000 in the second year*



▲ *Andy Burnham meets newlyweds Conor and Kira Rosato in Belfast on his first trip to Northern Ireland as PM* PHOTOGRAPH: BRIAN LAWLESS/PA

him of abandoning his previous commitments.

He wrote: "It appears you are going to break your promise to me - and the nation…. Weeks after being elected, you have made your first major U-turn."

He added: "This is your chance to actually deliver the start of that cleanup. Show us that politics can be clean and trustworthy. Don't surrender to the mess."

Other campaigners, including the broadcaster Carol Vorderman, are also urging the prime minister not to back down in the face of opposition from trade unions, who have warned a cap could undermine their ability to contribute to the Labour party.

Senior figures at groups including Transparency International, Spotlight on Corruption and Greenpeace have also written to Burnham.

In their open letter, they call for a "low and hard cap on all political donations", adding: "We know you agree that politics should not be for sale. Please take action now to ensure it will not be under your leadership."

The issue is set to come to a head next week when MPs debate the next stage of the elections bill. The bill will lower the voting age to 16 and cap donations by Britons based abroad, but not domestic donations.

Creasy had put forward an amendment to cap domestic donations at £100,000, while her colleague called for a cap at £1m.

However, Creasy has now changed her amendment to set the cap at £500,000, reducing in the second year to £100,000 unless ministers intervene to set it at a different level.

The proposal, which has cross-party support, mirrors what Burnham told Bowler he would support in May.

Burnham's aides say that, while the prime minister is not backing a donations cap next week, he is not ruling one out in the future.

A Labour source said: "This bill was designed to deliver our manifesto commitments on votes at 16 and to strengthen political donation rules to guard against foreign interference and that's what the government is prioritising. But we're not ruling out taking further steps to protect our democracy in the future."

Officials also said the government would not support an attempt by the Labour MP Anneliese Dodds to reduce the amount political parties can spend during an election campaign after the limit was raised by the previous Conservative government.

Sketch

John Crace

After needy Keir, Andy's trash talking might be a language the Donald can understand

It makes a pleasant change. Not so long ago, Keir Starmer was falling over himself in his efforts to keep things sweet with Donald Trump. Offering the US president a second state visit within minutes of meeting him.

Everyone knows you should never put out on the first date: it only makes the other person think you're a pushover. Sure enough, the Donald banked the marching bands and the Windsor silver service, made polite conversation for three days and then went back to trash-talking him.

Yet still, Starmer just sat there and took it. As if one word of criticism would be too much. Wittering on about the "special relationship", as if Trump gave a moment's thought to the UK before he did anything.

The rest of us wouldn't have put money on the US president even being able to locate Britain on a map. It was only latterly, when the Donald chose to bomb Iran, that the penny finally dropped for Starmer. And even then he looked pained by the apparent betrayal, as he resisted the calls of Kemi Badenoch and Nigel Farage to join in the war.

No such misgivings for Andy Burnham. This week, the prime minister was reminded that, when he was mayor of Greater Manchester, he had said the Donald wouldn't be welcome in his city and he could take his poisonous politics elsewhere. Words that had been loudly cheered at the time by many in Britain who had had enough of all the toadying.

Nor did Andy have any regrets now that he was prime minister and was likely to meet Trump in person for the first time at the UN general assembly in New York at the end of next month. Far from it. "Shit happens" was pretty much his precis of what had gone down. He wasn't going to apologise for what he had said. Not least because he had meant every word.

This was the real world. Politicians say stuff. Trump had said all sorts of things about him, too. That he had been mayor of "some town". To be fair to Agent Orange, it's quite likely he had never heard of Manchester before. Neither geography nor an interest in other people have ever been his strongest suits. All he had known about Andy was that he was "extremely liberal". Which in Maga language is the same as saying he's a "commie bastard".

So here was Burnham's deal. He wasn't planning to go out of his way to insult the US president, but neither would he be offering unexpurgated sycophancy.

Instead, we would be getting a very British type of pragmatism. He would do what was necessary in the UK's interest but not much more. They would be polite and try not to accentuate their differences, but there would be no pretence of any lasting friendship. Just stick to the matters in hand and get the hell out. After New York, Andy wouldn't be sending weekly WhatsApps. Out of sight, out of mind.

Weirdly, this performative show of an ersatz friendship - the US and UK are meant to be more or less on the same side, after all - is likely to be far more effective than Keir's more needy approach. Because this is the type of language the Donald understands.

"So I'm looking forward, actually, to my first meeting" with Trump, said Andy. And he probably is. His cards are on the table and he has nothing to hide. Plus, he has a sense of humour and self-deprecation, which also might confuse the US president, who has neither.

> *Trump had called Burnham mayor of 'some town'. To be fair to Agent Orange, it's quite likely he'd never heard of Manchester*

Russia says it may strike UK target over its help for Kyiv

➜ **Continued** *from page 1*

The US defence official said the most concerning shortfall involved Patriot missile interceptors, which can shoot down Russia's high-speed ballistic missiles. The Nato official confirmed the low inventories of Patriots among American and Nato forces in Europe. Both spoke on condition of anonymity.

Russia is believed to be contemplating stepping up its war with Ukraine after months of escalating Ukrainian attacks on Russia's oil refining infrastructure and other sites, which are imposing an increasing economic toll.

The Kremlin has adopted ever more bellicose rhetoric, much of it aimed at a domestic audience, as the war in Ukraine has been brought to its doorstep.

In the space of a few days Russia has invoked the threat of its nuclear arsenal against Japan over its territorial claim to the disputed Kuril Islands. It has described relations with the US as a "crisis" and at a historic low point.

Ratcliffe's reported warning mirrored one made by his predecessor, William Burns, in 2021 before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine - which Moscow also denied it was contemplating.

Concerns have been increasing amid a rise in incidents across Europe attributed to Moscow, from cyber-attacks and drones to arson, at facilities associated with supporting Ukraine's war efforts.

Russia and the US have tried to play down Ratcliffe's meeting with his Russian counterparts: Donald Trump on Wednesday described the visit as "semi routine". However, the encounter has caused intense speculation in the west and Russia.

Nato countries neighbouring Russia have moved quickly to increase their military readiness. Poland this week announced it had taken delivery of its first shipment of South Korean Black Panther main battle tanks, which will be deployed near the border with Russia's Kaliningrad region. Cezary Tomczyk, Poland's deputy defence minister, said this month Warsaw was preparing for the possibility of a full-scale conflict.

Lake Ontario 'renamed'
Trump signs order

Donald Trump signed an executive order last night directing the US federal government to change the name of Lake Ontario and instead call it Lake America.

The largely symbolic move comes amid an escalating trade war with Canada.

"We've notified all the various people we have to notify," Trump said after signing the order. "This is official effective immediately."

An administration official noted that the lake bordering Canada and the state of New York has most of its volume in the United States and that the deepest part of the lake is in United States territory.

On the first day of his second term in office, Trump signed an order renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America".

"We have a gulf and we have a lake - now all we need is an ocean. Maybe we'll have to change the name of the Atlantic and/or the Pacific," he told reporters in the Oval Office.

"Maybe we'll change them both," he added. George Chidi

In Film & Music
What happens when the music stops
Examining the life of jazz legend Bill Evans
Page 4 →

ADVERTISEMENT

NOTICE UNDER SECTION 27 OF THE TRUSTEE ACT 1925

Powerhouse Retail Group of the Electricity Supply Pension Scheme – Wind Up

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Section 27 of the Trustee Act 1925 that BESTrustees Limited, as the Group Trustee (the "**Group Trustee**") of the Powerhouse Retail Group (the "**Group**") of the Electricity Supply Pension Scheme (the "**ESPS**"), and Electricity Pensions Trustee Limited, as the Scheme Trustee of ESPS (the "**Scheme Trustee**") are winding up the Group following a merger of the Group with the Hanson Industrial Pension Scheme. The ESPS is an industry-wide pension scheme in which the Participating Employers are companies formed upon the privatisation of the electricity industry in 1990 or their successors.

The Group Trustee and Scheme Trustee wish to trace any persons who believe they may have any right to benefits from the Group and who have not received communications from BESTrustees Limited, Heidelberg Materials Group and HIPS (Trustees) Limited in relation to the merger of the Group with the Hanson Industrial Pension Scheme.

This notice is, therefore, published for completion before the trust of the Group is wound up. The Group's Sponsoring Employer is CHB P H R Limited (company number 02670582) and the Group is currently administered by Capita. The Group was previously known as the E&S Retail Ltd Group and the Group's Sponsoring Employer was previously known as E & S Retail Ltd and Powerhouse Retail Limited.

Any creditor, member or beneficiary of the Group or any other person who believes they have a claim against, or entitlement to a pension or any benefit from, or an interest in the Group is requested to write to **both the Group Trustee and the Scheme Trustee** by using the following details:

Group Trustee
By Post: c/o Hanson Pensions Team - Capita
PO Box 555
Stead House
Darlington
DL1 9YT

Scheme Trustee
By Email: Kevin.Groves@capita.com *and* esps@capita.com
By Post: c/o ESPS Scheme Secretary
Capita Pensions Solutions Ltd,
Hartshead House
2 Cutlers Gate
Sheffield
S4 7TL

To make a claim, please provide your full name, address, date of birth, NI number and, if applicable, dates of employment. If any other person believes they have a claim against or an interest in the Group, they are requested to write to the same address setting out full particulars of their claim. Please quote the Group name in all correspondence.

All claims must be received within two months of the date of this publication i.e. no later than 28 October 2026. After this date, the Group Trustee and the Scheme Trustee will proceed to complete the wind-up of the Group and secure benefits for any remaining beneficiaries, having regard only to the claims and interests of which they have prior notice. The Group Trustee and the Scheme Trustee shall not be liable to or in respect of any other person.

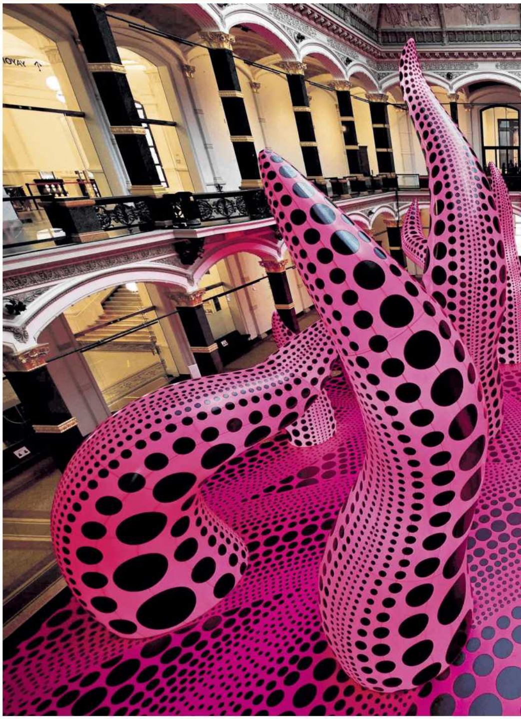
Any individuals who have already been contacted on behalf of the Group Trustee and/or the Scheme Trustee about this matter should not respond to this notice as the Group Trustee already has details of their claims and entitlements. Any person who has transferred their benefits out of the Group need not take any action as these persons do not have any benefits in the Group.

Issued for and on behalf of the Group Trustee of the Powerhouse Retail Group and the Scheme Trustee of the Electricity Supply Pension Scheme.

25 August 2026

tradingref.com

News
Yayoi Kusama
1929-2026



Yayoi Kusama, the outsider artist who became a global superstar, dies at 97

Tim Jonze
Sian Cain

Yayoi Kusama, the Japanese outsider artist who reached superstar status after decades living in a psychiatric hospital, has died aged 97.

Kusama died in a Tokyo hospital on 14 August, her company, Yayoi Kusama Inc, announced yesterday.

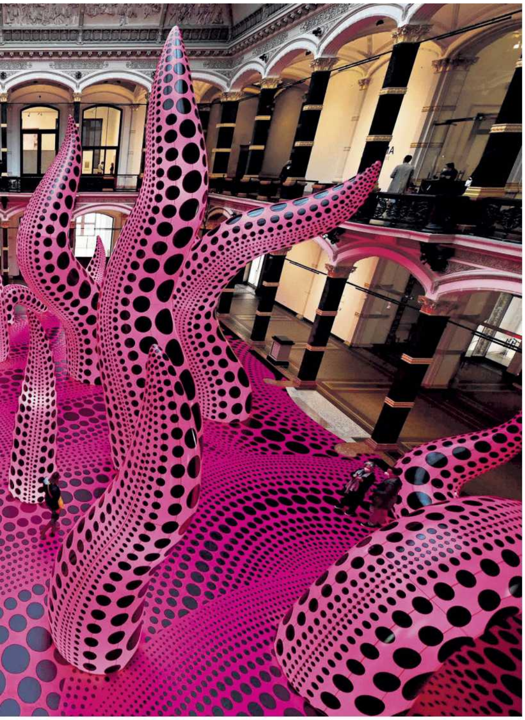
"Throughout an extraordinary lifetime devoted entirely to artistic creation, Kusama pursued an internationally acclaimed career as a pioneering avant garde artist whose creative practice encompassed visual art, performance, fiction, and poetry," it said in a statement. "She continued to paint until her final days, never setting aside her brush, and continued exploration of forever love and eternal soul.

"We will carry forward Kusama's wishes and, through art, continue to bring hope and strength for the future to people around the world."

Instantly recognisable by her bright red bobbed wig, Kusama became known for her psychedelic colour schemes and "infinity mirror room" installations, which helped her find a huge audience in the age of the selfie: her 2024 show in Australia was the most popular exhibition in the country's history. Yet she had pioneered many of her enduring themes as a young artist in the 1960s, before fading into temporary obscurity.

As well as being a sculptor and painter, Kusama put on numerous performance pieces throughout the hippy era that saw her name attached to scandal. She staged "body festivals" with naked performers painted in polka dots and wrote to the then US president, Richard Nixon, offering to

▲ *Pumpkin (2024) in west London*



◀ *Clockwise from main: a Berlin installation, A Bouquet of Love I Saw in the Universe; Yayoi Kusama: You, Me and the Balloons in Manchester in 2023; Yayoi Kusama wearing her trademark red bobbed wig in 2017*

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN MACDOUGALL/GETTY; DAVID LEVENE/THE GUARDIAN; TORU HANAI/REUTERS

sleep with him in return for an end to the Vietnam war. News of such events appalled her conservative family back home.

Kusama was born in Matsumoto, Japan, in 1929, enduring an unhappy childhood at the hands of an abusive mother and philandering father. Her wealthy family managed plant nurseries and Kusama would sit and draw the flowers despite her mother's frequent attempts to stop her.

As a child, Kusama began experiencing hallucinations, in which the flowers would swarm around and talk to her. Her coping mechanism was to draw what she saw.

During the second world war, 13-year-old Kusama was conscripted to produce fabric for Japanese army parachutes. She later studied *nihonga*, a traditional Japanese style of painting, in Kyoto, but grew frustrated with its limitations.

Rejecting her planned future of an arranged marriage and children, Kusama left Japan for New York in 1958. She fell in with the artist and theorist Donald Judd and made a breakthrough with her "infinity net" paintings – vast fields of impastoed polka dots across the canvas.

In 1962, she sold her first of these to Judd and the artist Frank Stella for $75. In 2014, her White No 28 sold for $7.1m (£5.7m) at auction, a record at the time for a living female artist.

In 1963, Kusama started making "soft sculptures" – pieces of furniture and other objects, such as ladders, covered with white, fabric-stuffed phallic shapes. They were, she said, her attempt to heal her disgust around sex, which she had been brought up to believe was shameful.

Despite working loosely within the spheres of pop art and minimalism, Kusama was not embraced by the art world. She always maintained that many of her ideas from this period were appropriated by white male artists, including Andy Warhol, while she was written out of art history.

Kusama's work was often centred on the infinite and the idea of "self-obliteration", inspired by the hallucinations that would engulf her. At the 1966 Venice Biennale she displayed her infamous Narcissus Garden, a "lake" of 1,500 reflective balls that strived for a sense of mirrored infinity. When Kusama began selling the balls under the banner "Your narcissism for sale", the biennale closed down the operation.

Kusama developed a flair for controversy. Her artistic "happenings" were often criticised for being mere shock material, yet their political statements now seem ahead of their time. In 1968, she staged New York's first "homosexual wedding" and washed a "dirty" Soviet flag outside the UN building in protest at the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

◀ *Kusama's sculpture Infinite Accumulation next to Liverpool Street station in London*

PHOTOGRAPH: VUK VALCIC/ZUMA/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ *An exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, in 2024. Her shows sold out swiftly*

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM DENHOLM/GETTY IMAGES/NGV

By this time Kusama was engaged in a platonic yet obsessive relationship with the outsider artist Joseph Cornell, which continued even after she returned to Japan. She had been frequently admitted to hospital while in New York and when Cornell died in 1972, her mental health deteriorated further, with hallucinations, panic attacks and suicide attempts.

In 1977, she checked herself into a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo that offered art therapy courses and gave Kusama the stability needed to work without distraction. She decided to live there permanently, working each day from morning until night in her nearby studio.

Although she published several novels in the 1980s, interest in Kusama appeared to have waned almost totally by the start of the 90s. But the recognition that had eluded her finally arrived later in life. In 1993 she created a mirrored room filled with small pumpkin sculptures for the Venice Biennale's Japanese pavilion and won plaudits for the work.

Kusama had retrospectives at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1998, Tate Modern in London in 2012 and Washington DC's Hirshhorn Museum in 2017. Tickets for her shows sold out swiftly around the world and fans would queue for hours just to be allowed a 30-second experience within her installations.

Despite some critics wondering if she had become the world's most popular artist, Kusama always believed that her place in history would not be decided by the art establishment. "I cannot imagine how I will be classified after my death," she once said. "It feels good to be an outsider."

Appreciation

A mirror of our time

I once had an argument about Yayoi Kusama with Peter Gabriel. Not in person – I've never met the prog rock hero. But after I recorded some critical comments on her work for the BBC, I watched the segment only to see Gabriel passionately defending her. My onscreen cynicism seemed harsh indeed compared with his soulful appreciation of all those dots.

My scepticism started the first time I saw Kusama's work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The context is significant because after a big dose of Jackson Pollock's looping, tangled forests of colour and line (colour as line), Piet Mondrian's pulsing Broadway Boogie Woogie and other great abstract art, her dots appeared to me static, planned, predictable. I wasn't excited or moved.

Well, things grow on you, or perhaps you just give up resisting. Kusama is truly ubiquitous, not just in galleries but social media, her moving life story adding to the popularity of her art, her cosmic sensibility carrying audiences along on psychedelic journeys into a natural world supercharged with outsize pixelations.

It was hard to resist her vision when I caught up with the Kusama phenomenon at Aviva Studios, Manchester, where vast installations and inflatables of dot-covered octopus tentacles and giant pumpkins made an industrial space feel enchanted.

The Kusama cult has grown alongside and inside an art world of slick worldwide galleries, with a clientele of one percenters who buy art like jewellery. Her work has an obvious appeal to this market: one of those big spotty fruits would be great by the pool. Yet so meaningful!

In truth, there's little connection between Kusama's troubled life and antiwar activism and the feelgood vibes of her art. Those lurid greens and oranges punctuated by lines of little black circles cannot really be experienced as marks of trauma or expressive howls. Instead they create a dreamy utopia.

But it takes a lot of Kusama to get me in the mood: where one of her works leaves me shrugging, a vast gathering does create enjoyable sensory overload.

It can be a lot of fun, but I don't think she was a patch on truly mind-bending artists such as Pollock or Bridget Riley. When you look into one of Riley's abstract vortices your brain is interfered with. You see depths and heights that are not there. One work by Kusama can't provide that complexity. You have to overdose on them, drowning out your inner nay-saying voice with so many dots you dizzy yourself.

Lots of everything, filling every moment, crowding out thought. Yayoi Kusama was the mirror of our time. That is undeniable.

Jonathan Jones

iPlayer 2.0? BBC chief proposes platform that would rival YouTube

Matt Brittin said he 'hadn't quite understood the severity' of the financial pressures facing the BBC
PHOTOGRAPH: CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES

Michael Savage
Media editor

Matt Brittin has suggested opening up the BBC to YouTube-style user-generated content, as he backed the idea of a "public service algorithm" free from the interests of US tech companies.

The BBC's director general, who arrived at the corporation after 10 years leading Google in Europe, said the corporation and public service media in Britain had the opportunity to build a platform "unadulterated by commercial interests, by algorithms that have other interests at heart".

Speaking at the Edinburgh TV festival, he said concerns about the influence and impact of social media algorithms were now the "most interesting public debate" in the US.

It follows Meta making an $18bn settlement to end a lawsuit that alleged its social networks were addictive and harmful to children.

While stating it was not BBC policy, Brittin raised the idea of turning an "iPlayer 2.0" into a YouTube-style site hosting appropriate content from creators. It would be built around an algorithm aimed at "educating, informing and entertaining the public here and ideally around the world".

"I'd like to be an open platform for creativity," he said. "What if we could say to people, create content about where you live, about the sports teams you follow, about the skills and the businesses that are in the area, and do that in line with our guidelines," he said. "You don't have to be Lyse Doucet, but there would be some BBC guidelines.

"We should have a public service algorithm … [iPlayer] should do it in a way that's not biased towards the incentives of a US tech company or commercial interests. It should be biased towards what we want public service to be all about."

Brittin said it would allow creators to access "the expertise and the platform and the reach and the trust in the BBC, in return for signing up for some policies that might be different from YouTube".

The idea would be a major departure from the current iPlayer, which he said had "fallen behind" in an increasingly digital landscape.

> *'We need to create, I think, a sovereign media public space'*
>
> **Matt Brittin**
> *BBC director general*

The idea may well find favour among some in Downing Street. The concept of the BBC developing a public service algorithm was raised back in 2019 by James Purnell, the former BBC executive who is now Andy Burnham's chief of staff.

Brittin was speaking after the BBC presenter Amol Rajan had given a speech suggesting the corporation was "screwed" unless it adopted a radically different funding model.

Brittin said he "hadn't understood quite the severity" of the BBC's financial pressures, stating it had lost about £1.3bn in revenue over the last decade - 60% from government decisions such as freezing the licence fee and 40% from fewer people paying the licence fee.

He conceded the plan to save £500m would be difficult, and good programmes would go.

"It's hard and I don't think there are programmes that nobody's watching or services that nobody enjoys," he said.

"Obviously, to get to that scale of savings, there's uncertainty hanging over a lot more colleagues than those who will eventually leave the organisation. That's really hard to deal with. But let's be clear … 90% of the people in the BBC will remain."

He said Rajan's fear that the BBC would shrink at an accelerating rate was not inevitable if the corporation reached the right new funding model in ongoing government talks. However, he said reports that Newsnight was under threat were "nonsense".

"We need to create, I think, a sovereign media public space where we can create content that tells stories of who we are, that has our values, that is unadulterated by commercial interests, by algorithms that have other interests at heart," he said.

"So the next generation of creators … can participate in that - and that can reach people around the world."

Sale
now on
Lock it in with a £75PP deposit*
If not now, when?
SKYTEAM
virgin atlantic holidays
Virgin
*Exclusions apply. Full balance due within 84 days of departure. Deposit varies by booking. Book by 30 Sep 2026.
Full terms: virginatlantic.com/terms

Council seeks injunction to stop Raise the Colours erecting flags

Neha Gohil
Midlands correspondent

Birmingham city council is seeking an injunction to stop members of an anti-migrant group erecting flags, including union jacks and St George's crosses, on public infrastructure.

A nationwide campaign to give prominence to the England flag, which resulted in thousands of St George's crosses being flown from lamp-posts, roundabouts and other public places, is believed to have started last summer in Birmingham.

The Raise the Colours campaign has polarised opinion. Some view the flags as patriotic, while others have criticised it as a display of nationalism aimed at intimidating minority ethnic people. In July, Birmingham residents accused the city council of giving "free rein" to flag raisers.

The same month, Oxfordshire county council, where there has also been a proliferation of flag displays, secured a permanent high court injunction to stop the flying of flags from lamp-posts. Justice Dias said council workers "faced abuse or intimidation while taking flags down, as well as residents".

On Wednesday, Birmingham city council said it was pursuing legal action to stop the raising of flags, based on evidence it had gathered, including incidents that involved harassment, intimidation or obstruction of staff who were tasked with removing them. The council's application named the co-founder of the Raise the Colours campaign, Ryan Bridge, as well as seven others.

The Green party councillor Jane Baston, Birmingham city council's cabinet member for equalities, communities and social justice, said: "The council is taking a lawful, proportionate and evidence-led approach to unauthorised attachments on the highway. This includes pursuing injunctive action based on the evidence gathered to date.

"Our priority is to protect public safety, staff and contractor welfare, community cohesion and the responsible use of public funds. We ask residents and community groups to support this approach and to ensure any displays are placed only where permission exists."

The council said its approach was focused on lawful highway management, public safety and community cohesion, as well as the responsible use of public funds. It also said it continued to manage unauthorised attachments on public highways, including flags, banners and signage, through a structured and evidence-led process.

Raise the Colours, which describes itself as a "grassroots movement for unity and patriotism", said it had not received or reviewed the court papers and could not comment on the application. The group, however, denied "any suggestion that we are seeking to divide communities", in a statement uploaded to Instagram.

Bridge was one of four named individuals who agreed to stop the unauthorised hanging of flags on or near public highways in Oxfordshire after that county council was granted an injunction.

In its claim to the high court, the Liberal Democrat council in Oxford said contractors removing flags had been met "with hostility and obstruction". The claim also acknowledged Bridge was arrested in Oxford on suspicion of causing religiously and racially aggravated harassment in April. Thames Valley police said he had not been charged and the investigation was continuing.

Last week, Bridge pleaded not guilty to common assault after he was charged by Sussex police over an incident in Brighton in June and was released on court bail.

On its website, Raise the Colours states it "does not support vigilante behaviour, unauthorised activity, or attempts by individuals to take the law into their own hands.

"Any individual choosing to travel abroad or take physical action does so entirely on their own initiative and without our support, approval or encouragement."

▲ *Heavy rain in Liverpool* PHOTOGRAPH: ADAM VAUGHAN/EPA

Floods hit Birmingham as thunderstorms follow summer of heatwaves

▲ *Flooding in the Perry Barr area of Birmingham on Wednesday night. More than 30 houses were affected*
PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY

Neha Gohil

Dozens of homes have been damaged by flooding and the Met Office issued warnings for thunderstorms and heavy rain at the end of a summer in which most of England and the whole of Wales was declared in drought.

The Met Office said thundery showers in England and Wales could cause 75mm (3in) of rain to fall in just 12 hours in some areas.

The Environment Agency (EA) issued 40 flood alerts, where flooding is possible, across the Midlands, Yorkshire and the south-east yesterday morning. A flood alert was issued for the River Maun at Edwinstowe and Ollerton in Nottinghamshire.

The EA said river levels at Mansfield the Dykes gauging station were rising rapidly owing to the nature of the catchment, and Old Rufford Road was most at risk.

A yellow thunderstorm warning for parts of the Midlands, the east, south and north-west of England, Yorkshire and Humber, and Wales was in place until 10pm last night.

A second yellow warning for Lincolnshire, parts of the east of England, parts of Yorkshire, Kent and Medway was in place until 7am today.

Climate scientists have warned that global heating is causing more volatile weather patterns, with intense heatwaves, droughts, flooding and storms. Five heatwaves have been recorded in the UK this summer.

A Birmingham man whose property was damaged in thunderstorms on Wednesday night described seeing a "river coming around the corner" before his home was flooded.

Areas of Birmingham were hit by significant flooding on Wednesday after the EA issued a flood warning for the Perry Barr area. Staffordshire, where a lower-level flood alert was in place, had 60mm of rain in 12 hours, according to the EA.

West Midlands fire service was alerted to flooding at 32 properties near the Tame Valley canal on Wednesday evening and sent seven fire engines to the scene. Ryan Goodwin, who lives on one of the affected streets, said his conservatory was flooded with 1 metre of water and his living room was damaged.

▲ *Reading festival fans arrive. More rain is forecast over the weekend*

He told the Press Association: "About 7.30pm I got home, I was in the car with the kids and I thought: I don't want to get out yet, there's too many puddles here. Then in a matter of about half an hour it was just a river coming round the corner, all the way down the road."

The EA said after a National Drought Group meeting yesterday morning that 71.3% of England remained in drought. It said only 34% of the rainfall typically expected in August had been received so far.

The agency's chief executive, Philip Duffy, said: "A few days or even weeks of wetter weather cannot reverse the impacts of several months of exceptionally dry conditions."

Former bank boss denies sex with woman dressed as Snow White

Kalyeena Makortoff
Banking correspondent

The former Barclays boss Jes Staley has denied having sex with a woman dressed as Snow White, after being questioned about an infamous email exchange about Disney princesses with Jeffrey Epstein.

The comments were detailed in newly released transcripts from a closed-door interview last month with US lawmakers as part of their investigation into Epstein, who died in prison in August 2019 while awaiting trial on child sex-trafficking charges.

In the email exchange on 9 and 10 July 2010 Staley and Epstein referred to Disney princesses. In those messages, the details of which have been circulating in the media since 2021, Staley tells Epstein: "That was fun. Say hi to Snow White."

Epstein then asks: "What character would you like next?" to which Staley replied: "Beauty and the Beast." Epstein responded: "Well one side is availble [sic]."

During his congressional testimony, Staley, who spent more than three decades at JPMorgan Chase before joining Barclays in 2015, was asked: "Did you ever have sex with a young woman in a Snow White costume?

"No, I did not," Staley said.

Lawmakers then questioned Staley about another email, sent to Epstein by an unnamed individual on 10 July 2010 and which said: "the snow white was f..ed twice as soon as she put her costume))". Epstein appears to have asked an unnamed individual to buy a Snow White costume weeks before those exchanges, on 20 June 2010.

"Why would this young woman have sent this email to Mr Epstein if the two of you had not had sex while she was wearing a Snow White costume and if Mr Epstein had not instructed her to do so?" a congressional representative, whose name has been redacted from the transcript, asked.

"I have no idea who else she was with. I - it has nothing to do with me, though," Staley said. When pressed further, he said: "I may have seen her in apartment [sic] and prompted that email. But I was not with a person dressed as Snow White outside of potentially crossing at his apartment."

The representative asked: "So you may have seen her in his apartment, later emailed Mr Epstein and said, 'That was fun,' but it was not because you had sex with her?"

"That's correct," Staley said.

The former banker was also asked whether he and Epstein used "Disney princesses as code names for selecting women for sexual encounters", to which Staley replied, "No."

Zara owner launches cut-price Lefties to challenge Primark

Sarah Butler

The owner of Zara is taking on Primark, Shein and the supermarkets with the launch of its cut-price chain Lefties in Britain, backed by an army of robots.

The Spanish fashion brand opened its first UK store in Liverpool yesterday, a few weeks after quietly launching its UK website.

The store has embraced robotics to reduce staffing costs, with self-checkouts that scan a whole basket in one go and a clothes hanger sorter. Shoppers put their hangers in a slot as they pay and they are taken on a hidden conveyor belt to two robots behind a screen that sort them into boxes for different sizes.

The outlet at the Liverpool One city centre development also has fitting rooms equipped with a hatch through which unwanted items go to be sorted behind the scenes, again by robots.

The garment-sorting system splits clothes into rails for each department ready to be taken away to the shop floor or packed into the stockroom.

The Liverpool store is the first of three Lefties planned in the UK this year. The other two will be in the Lakeside shopping centre in Essex and the Metrocentre in Gateshead. More are expected next year.

Just before the official opening, as more than 100 customers queued up to be the first British shoppers, the chain's general director said the group was "not thinking about a specific number" of UK stores and would look at how the first few went before taking the next steps.

Xavier Ruz Riera said Liverpool had been chosen as the first outlet as it was a city with a vibrant young population that, as a port, was "open to the world" and "has a great personality".

The Lefties name comes from the fact its owner, Inditex, launched it in 1999 as an outlet for unsold, or leftover, items from Zara. However, it stopped selling its bigger sister brand's clothing about a decade ago, instead stocking its own range of men's, women's and children's clothing, shoes, and homewares.

As Zara has moved slightly upmarket, Lefties has stepped in as a more cost-conscious option. Its products are a touch above Primark but below Shein on price, with dresses an average of £18, compared with £16 at the British chain and £18.50 at the Chinese-founded marketplace, according to analysis by the trade journal Retail Week.

In a nod to the UK's winter weather, the Liverpool store is the first Lefties to stock thermal clothing, presenting a new competitor to Marks & Spencer and Uniqlo on basic underwear, with bras from £7.99.

Riera said the store would flex to meet local demands, taking feedback from its sales figures and shop staff.

Its clothing and stores have more focus on design than Primark and it offers a nationwide online delivery service, unlike its British rival, which only offers click and collect from its website. However, Lefties does not offer frequent discounts in the same way as Shein or other rivals.

Its garment-sorting machine is also in use at five UK Zaras, but the clothes hanger sorting system is a first for the group in Britain.

The chain operates in 20 countries including Italy, Turkey and Romania, with 225 stores globally.

▲ *Jenni Murray, who died on 12 March, hosted Woman's Hour on Radio 4 for 33 years* PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/THE GUARDIAN

Jenni Murray died eight days after car crash, inquest told

Kevin Rawlinson

The broadcaster Jenni Murray died days after being involved in a car crash that happened when she was dazzled by headlights, a coroner has heard.

Murray, 75, was best known as the voice of BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, hosting the programme for three decades and becoming the longest-serving presenter in its history.

She died on 12 March this year after the collision in north London eight days earlier, the inquest into her death heard yesterday. The north London area coroner Tony Murphy ruled Murray's cause of death was bronchopneumonia caused by fractures to her rib and sternum sustained in the crash.

At the inquest at Barnet coroner's court, Murphy read a statement from Dr Clare Morkane, a consultant at the Royal Free hospital, where Murray died after being admitted on 4 March.

"Jennifer had been driving when she became dazzled by vehicle lights and collided with two stationary vehicles. Following the collision, Jennifer was unable to recall events, exited the vehicle independently and she was conveyed to hospital," Morkane said.

The collision took place on Wildwood Road, near Hampstead Heath, shortly before 8pm, the inquest heard. It caused "multiple rib fractures", a fracture to her upper sternum and a collapsed lung.

In hospital, Murray was placed on non-invasive ventilation and moved to intensive care but developed bronchopneumonia.

Morkane said that after a significant deterioration on 10 March, a decision was made to focus on palliative care. "Jennifer died peacefully on 12 March 2026 at approximately 15.45 hours," she said.

The Metropolitan police investigated the crash but closed their inquiry.

Murray's husband, David Forgham-Bailey, attended the hearing via video link.

After Murray's death, the former Labour deputy leader Harriet Harman called her "the broadcasting wing of the women's movement".

Murray announced on Woman's Hour in 2006 that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer and began raising awareness of the condition as a vice-patron for Breast Cancer Now, a position she held for almost 20 years. She was made a dame in 2011 in recognition of her contribution to broadcasting.

APRIL 2026
Which? Recommended Provider
MOBILE NETWORK PROVIDERS

SMARTY
Simple, honest mobile

32GB
£8
DOUBLE DATA

Plus, you're free to leave anytime.

Search 'SMARTY Mobile'

Limited time only. SIM only 1 month plan. 32GB for £8, sign up by 9/11/26. Terms at smarty.co.uk

IS CHOICE REAL?

'You notice the quiet'

Lorde headlines festival powered by green energy

Far left, Massive Attack's Act 1.5 show in 2024; left, Lorde and Little Simz will perform this weekend

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOEL GOODMAN/ANTHONY DEVLIN/HOGAN MEDIA

Steven Morris

When Lorde, Little Simz and Wet Leg stride on to stages in Bristol this weekend, they will not only be entertaining tens of thousands of festivalgoers but taking part in what is being billed as a world-first clean power project.

The two stages at Forwards festival on Clifton Down are being driven almost entirely by green power - a combination of hydrogen and mobile batteries charged with sustainable energy.

Across the globe, artists and major festivals have been taking action to make their events more sustainable. But what makes the clean power pilot (CPP) scheme driving this weekend's festival different is that it is backed with regional public money and political will. Over the summer, CPP has guaranteed a secure source of green mobile power to festivals, events and television crews.

About a dozen events, including the Bristol Balloon Fiesta, have been powered with help from CPP. Television shows filmed in Bristol, such as the drama Mavis Eccleston have tapped into CPP. The performances of Lorde and the rest this weekend are seen as the pinnacle.

Ben Price, the head of partnerships at Team Love, which is running the festival on the Downs, said it felt like a gamechanger. The geography and geology of the site mean the festival can't access green energy from the National Grid and the economics of producing such events make it impractical for them to invest in their own temporary energy supply. "We need the backing of public money to de-risk it," Price said.

CPP grew out of a homecoming gig in Bristol by the trip-hop collective Massive Attack that was credited with producing the lowest-ever carbon emissions for such an event. Act 1.5, a creative industry project that brings together artists, technicians and scientists, worked with Massive Attack on the gig and wanted to take the concept further.

The West of England mayoral combined authority backed the project, providing financial backing while the Green-led Bristol city council has given its support, as have clean energy providers and the region's biggest television studio, Bottle Yard in Bristol.

Mark Donne, the lead producer of Act 1.5, said it was a global first. "There isn't any comparable programme anywhere, in terms of scale, design or sectors procuring and acting together - no precedent or comparison."

John O'Sullivan, another senior figure in Act 1.5, said it meant many fewer noisy, diesel-guzzling generators at events and sets. "The only thing you notice is the quiet," he said.

Greener
Power Solutions
Mobile battery power.
Go Greener.

◀ *One of the stages at Forwards festival, which will be powered by hydrogen and green energy batteries*

PHOTOGRAPH: ALICIA CANTER/THE GUARDIAN

Act 1.5 added that it was working with other mayoral authorities across England to roll out the concept further and there had been international interest.

This weekend, the main stage is being driven by a compact hydrogen power plant set up by GeoPura. The only byproduct of the set-up is pure water, which Lorde and other artists who perform there will be invited to sample at the end of their gigs.

A second stage and other areas are driven by battery units topped with electricity from renewable suppliers. These are backed up by generators powered by hydrotreated vegetable oil.

Robert Del Naja, of Massive Attack, said the group's 2024 show was never meant to be a one-off. He said: "This project was always about systemic change, so it's gratifying to see this permanent legacy of decarbonisation for all major festivals and film and TV productions in Bristol.

"Looking at the bigger picture, so much time has been wasted by real bases of power - national governments, transnationals and the tactical misdirection of the corporate media - and now the world finds itself surpassing 1.5 degrees and chronically unprepared for wildfires, drought, violent storms and food insecurity.

"Projects like Act 1.5 can be seen as a catalyst for all sectors and civil society more widely. We don't have to wait for governments to rehabilitate themselves from fossil fuel cartels, or for the White House to someday relocate its mind. We have the imagination, the intelligence and the will to act now, and act with the required intent."

Dawson's Creek star reveals she has had brain tumour removed

Press Association

Busy Philipps has revealed she has had surgery to remove a brain tumour, which was diagnosed shortly after her Dawson's Creek co-star died from colorectal cancer.

The 47-year-old starred in the US teen drama as Audrey Liddell opposite James Van Der Beek, who died in February aged 48. She told People she was grateful to be alive after the "weirdest six months of my life". Known for Freaks and Geeks, Girls5eva and Cougar Town, Philipps said she felt like something was "misfiring" but did not present any obvious tumour symptoms, such as seizures, and was reassured by her doctor that she did not need to have a scan.

▲ *Busy Philipps was diagnosed just after her co-star's death from cancer*

Months later, after consulting a second doctor, she had a whole-body MRI in February, which led to the discovery of a grade 2 oligodendroglioma, a rare low-grade (slow-growing) tumour. In March she underwent five-hour surgery to remove a 2.6cm mass from her brain.

Speaking to People, Philipps said: "I didn't know why I wanted to get this scan except for the fact that I just did. We are frequently told by doctors that there is nothing to worry about [when] you kind of know that there's something to worry about. There's nothing to be afraid of in having information. It's only empowering."

Philipps said she had been telling friends for two years that her "brain feels broken" and assumed certain behaviours were caused by perimenopause. Her doctor could not confirm whether this feeling was related to the tumour. She said: "I wasn't consciously aware that anything was really wrong, but there was something that was misfiring. Like, I could not get a handle on it. [Now] my brain does not feel broken any more."

Philipps told her ex-husband, the film-maker Marc Silverstein, she was considering cancelling the scan as it came days after the death of Van Der Beek and just before an audition for the legal drama Cupertino. She said: "He's like, 'Maybe it's the best thing you could do for your friend this morning. Go get that scan.'"

When her neurologist told her the news, Philipps said she was "hyperventilating and trying to breathe". Two days after the surgery, she was back home recovering and said she "wasn't in pain at all" with more than 40 surgical staples in her forehead.

Philipps started her "dream job" in Cupertino, but then learned she had contracted a staphylococcus infection in her incision and needed surgery. Despite this she said she felt grateful, adding: "What am I? The luckiest girl in the world?"

Comedy

Norman No-Mates wins over the crowd

Freddie Meredith, the dork we really want to spend an hour with

Need a Light?
Pleasance Courtyard
★★★★☆

Brian Logan

Ever pretended to use your phone to avoid the shame of being Norman No-Mates at a party? Freddie Meredith's new show is a channelling of that experience, an hour-long cringe at a man labouring to strike up conversations in a nightclub smoking area.

Meredith, a familiar face to viewers of Big Boys, Such Brave Girls and other TV series, has alighted on a familiar social type: a shy, insecure beta male desperately trying to look, well, alpha is out of his reach, but even basic social functioning would be an upgrade.

He sounds like a dork, right? And so he is, in his wannabe hip dad-wear, with his fantasies about being in the audience on Top Gear. But beyond the David Brent stylings is someone we're rooting for by the show's uplifting end.

Meredith performs the hour, all awkward grooviness, nervous laughter and duff small talk with the crowd with a face that looks perpetually as if it could burst into tears. But there's something heroic in the effort. Social outcast he may be, but he's doing his best to learn the route back in - all those codes and behaviours that come so easily to other people.

"Planning any house parties?" to one other raver doesn't quite cut it - but it prompts a wonderfully needy monologue on Meredith's part, pledging to be the best house guest imaginable.

Occasionally a sketch stretches the conceit to near breaking point. But we indulge them because we're seduced by the drab tenderness with which Meredith constructs his world, where a loner fails to learn social skills - yet makes devoted friends of his audience.

Until Sunday

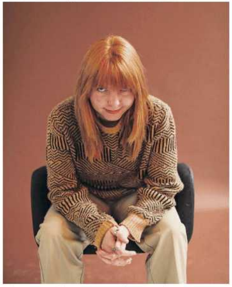
Stage

Well schooled in the offbeat and the absurd

Dog Ear
Pleasance Courtyard
★★★☆☆

Brian Logan

▼ Marty Gleeson's fringe debut tests the limits of comedic convention



There's an excellent joke about art school in Marty Gleeson's show, but even without it, we might guess that the Irish comic comes from an art school background. In Dog Ear, convention is for the birds, with one leftfield idea following the next in a disorienting array.

A visit to the future accompanied by fluttering beats on the bodhrán? A standup set performed by one of the thousands of bugs on Gleeson's body? Throughout her fringe debut, Gleeson delights in ensuring we've never the slightest idea what's about to happen. That makes it an offbeat delight, and at its best, this Limerick exile's material is captivatingly unexpected.

Even before its droll punchline, her routine about asking Santa for a "big juicy booty" is quite the gambit. Another, extending the closing credits of a news bulletin ad absurdum, is similarly strange - and tests the limits of how long something uneasy can happen before a punchline arrives to redeem it. Occasionally, that might strand you in the middle of a patience-stretching routine that isn't all that funny, but Dog Ear is seldom less than diverting.

Until Sunday

Read on
Last chance

Subscribe and save 50% for three months

Your weekly read, al fresco

This summer, get 50% off the Guardian Weekly magazine, showcasing the best of the Guardian's journalism, culture, opinion, and puzzles.

Also enjoy ad-free reading and unlimited access to the Guardian, Feast, and Editions apps.
Subscribe before this limited-time offer ends.

Visit theguardian.com/gwsummer or scan the QR code

Package	Full price per quarter	Intro offer 50% off for the first quarter
Quarterly subscription	~~£57~~	£28.50
Price per issue	~~£4.47~~	£2.24

The Guardian Weekly

Introductory offer for quarterly subscriptions is £28.50/for the first quarter, then £57/quarter afterwards unless you cancel. Offer only available to new Guardian Weekly subscribers. Offer ends 11:59pm BST on 6 September 2026.

▼ *Scientists compared historical El Niño data by analysing coral fossils from the Galápagos Islands*
PHOTOGRAPH: JESSE KRAFT/ALAMY

▲ *Mumbai, India, where the monsoon season is suppressed by El Niño. Right, Coonabarabran, a town in New South Wales, Australia, where drier conditions trigger droughts*
PHOTOGRAPHS: PUNIT PARANJPE/ AFP/GETTY; BROOK MITCHELL/GETTY

Effects of El Niño and global heating reinforce each other, scientists suggest

Oliver Milman

A series of strong El Niño climatic patterns in recent decades, similar to the "Godzilla" event that is expected to disrupt weather patterns around the world, have been supercharged by the overheating of the planet caused by the burning of fossil fuels, a new study has found.

El Niño is a naturally occurring phenomenon, taking place every two to seven years, where the waters of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean heat up, causing a cascade of effects around the world. The latest developing El Niño, which will peak later this year, is expected to be the strongest in living memory and has been informally called a "Godzilla" event.

It is well understood that El Niño, which typically brings a surge of global heat, further amplifies the worsening climate crisis, with next year almost certain to be the hottest on record globally.

But the new research has established that the reverse is also the case: human-caused global heating is making El Niño itself more intense when it does arrive.

"Our findings suggest El Niño can supercharge global warming but also global warming can supercharge El Niño - that is what we are seeing," said Julia Cole, a climate researcher at the University of Michigan, who led the new study, published in Science.

"We are seeing a trend of stronger El Niños and the one we have now is consistent with that trend, it's not a fluke. We are seeing a shift where El Niño doesn't look like what it did prior to industrial times. That is bad news for climate hazards and for people, particularly those who are badly impacted and yet have done little to cause climate change."

As the world has heated up because of the use of fossil fuels, a series of recent "super" El Niño events have provided extra acceleration, with intense events breaking the global temperature records in 1998, then in 2016 and again in 2024.

Such strong El Niño episodes have become far more common as overall global temperatures have risen, scientists found in the new research, which analysed the composition of large boulder-like deposits of coral fossils found on the Galápagos Islands.

These old corals, which date back 1,000 years, contain chemical compositions that indicate what the sea surface temperature was like when they were alive. The Galápagos archipelago, which is off the coast of mainland Ecuador, is "right in the heart of El Niño country", Cole said, where surrounding waters heat up during such an event.

While El Niños remained fairly stable for most of this period, things started to change around the time the world started to mass industrialise in the late 19th century. This process has become even more extreme in the past 40 years, with El Niños' variability now about 37% higher than during pre-industrial times.

"After the El Niño in 1982, we start seeing much more variability, it's a lot more extreme and looks like nothing in the previous 1,000 years," said Cole, whose team managed to rule out any random or naturally occurring cause.

The findings could help provide an answer to one of the more vexing questions in climate science, about whether the climate crisis is significantly changing the strength of El Niño events.

"This is a strong indication that climate change may already be amplifying El Niño events," said Samantha Stevenson-Karl, a University of California, Santa Barbara scientist and study co-author. "If that's true, then really large events like the one that seems to be brewing in the tropical Pacific right now might become more common in the future."

> ***'Large events like the one … in the tropical Pacific might become more common'***
>
> **Prof Stevenson-Karl**
> *UC Santa Barbara*

Such a scenario is expected to have profound effects upon countries already dealing with heatwaves, wildfires and flooding worsened by the climate crisis. As El Niño gathers strength, caused by the weakening of trade winds that usually push surface heat to the western Pacific, parts of South America and the southern US often face heavier rainfall and floods.

In India, the monsoon season is typically weakened by El Niño, while countries such as Indonesia and Australia face drier conditions.

The huge El Niño event currently growing could push about 50 million people into acute hunger because of the effect on food production, a recent forecast found.

"We can prepare and try to adapt," Cole said. "But we also need to look at the root cause, which is the fossil fuels we are burning every day. We need to get away from greenhouse-gas-producing technologies as quickly as possible."

Restored Cheshire wetland offers haven for rare black-necked grebe

Patrick Barkham

A dumping ground for dredgings from the Manchester Ship Canal has become the best place in Britain for the rare and beautiful black-necked grebe, hosting 64% of Britain's breeding population.

Since 2021, Woolston Eyes in Cheshire has been restored, extended and turned into a mosaic of freshwater pools, reedbeds, willow scrub and rough grassland, managed by the RSPB and Woolston Eyes Conservation Group.

▲ *Numbers of black-necked grebes have grown rapidly at Woolston Eyes*

Wetland areas on a dried-out and overgrown settlement lagoon were revived and nesting islands created, with the aim of attracting black-headed gulls, which black-necked grebes nest beside for protection from predators. The wetlands also provided a new wealth of invertebrate food for the glossy black-and-chestnut birds, which sport tufts of gold feathers behind ruby-red eyes.

In 2023, four pairs of black-necked grebes bred on the newly restored area, successfully raising 15 young. By 2025, 35 pairs of black-necked grebes were recorded, 29 of which nested on the newly restored wetland area. The total represents 64% of the average number of breeding pairs recorded annually across the UK.

"It is fantastic to see black-necked grebe numbers increasing at Woolston Eyes thanks to the hard work of staff, volunteers and partners to create prime habitat for this rare and attractive species," said Gavin Thomas, an RSPB ecologist. "The growth in numbers shows how effective targeted conservation action can be and is a great example of nature thriving when it is given a chance."

The site of special scientific interest in Warrington is also a stronghold for other rare and unusual species including willow tit, pochard and grasshopper warbler.

While Woolston Eyes relies on rainfall to remain wet, water can be moved between areas so they can be dried out, refreshed and reflooded - a crucial rotation for the black-necked grebe, which will abandon wetlands that become too "mature".

Thomas added: "Seeing the number of black-necked grebes continuing to increase at Woolston Eyes makes all the hard work worthwhile. We need to deliver far more sites like Woolston throughout the UK."

Turn down the heat

Chefs switch from gas to induction hobs as kitchen temperatures soar

Fiona Harvey
Environment editor

Leaping flames, searing heat, copious sweat and scorchingly inventive swearing - restaurant kitchens are never a place for the faint-hearted, but this summer they have been sweltering in successive heatwaves to a dangerous degree.

Some restaurants, cafes and bakeries in the UK grew so hot that they were forced to close, or reduce their hours, for the safety of their staff. There is still no maximum working temperature, despite calls from the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and tens of thousands of kitchen staff are thought to have carried on working in "furnace-like" conditions above 45C.

Now a number of chefs are calling for one route to cooling kitchens. Swapping gas hobs for electric induction cooking can reduce temperatures by as much as 5C to 10C, as induction cookers heat only the food in the pans. They are more efficient, can reduce costs, are safer as they avoid the harmful pollutants emitted by gas cookers, and make it easier for air conditioning to work in crowded kitchen environments. But up to now many chefs have been reluctant to make the change.

"There is that sense of theatre with fire and flames," says Jeremy Pang, a third-generation Chinese chef and founder of the School of Wok in London. "It feels quite traditional and exciting. But we have found that we can get just as high temperatures, and just as good cooking, with electric."

The secret to traditional Chinese cookery lies in the "wok hei", meaning the smoke and heat that the chef must master, to give all ingredients the right degree of scorching and flavour. Pang was worried that this would be harder to achieve with electric, but soon found that he could reach temperatures of 350-400C.

"We use carbon steel with oil, and you can still get that actual smoke and flavour that you would with gas," he told the Guardian. "Gas cookers are incredibly good equipment, but you get so much heat off them, it's a huge problem."

A report from the Global Cooksafe Coalition (GCC) found that restaurants could save thousands on their energy bills alone from making the switch. One gastropub was able to cut its energy use by almost two-thirds. The cost of the retrofit would be repaid within three years, and the pub was likely to save £65,000 over 10 years, the report found.

For Chantelle Nicholson, who insisted on electric hobs when opening her Apricity restaurant in Mayfair, central London, in 2022, cleaning and safety are also key. Induction hobs are quicker and easier to clean, which is popular with staff. "I used to have burn marks all up my arms from scrubbing gas hobs," Nicholson told the Guardian. "And when anything goes wrong with the gas, it's a total nightmare to get it fixed. Induction is controllable and really reliable."

She was also concerned about studies showing that gas cookers emit pollutants and have been linked to asthma. "To me, electric is clearly the way forward," she said.

Diners at the chef's table in her restaurant have also noticed. "They compliment us on how calm the kitchen is," she said. Apricity won a Michelin Green Star for its efforts.

Lowering the temperature of the kitchen also means fridges have to work less hard, and there is less need for air conditioning and ventilation. Chet Sharma, chef-patron at London's Bibi restaurant, said: "A hot kitchen doesn't really exist with induction, since there is no heat loss. Induction is super-efficient. It keeps our bills down and keeps the staff happier, not sweating away at the stoves all day."

Luke Burgess, the owner of Scholé in Australia, quoted in the GCC report, found that cleaning time was reduced from 24 minutes for a gas cooktop to 21 seconds for an induction cooktop, which he calculated saved more than £15,700 a year in wages alone.

Camilla Born, the chief executive of Electrify Britain, a body funded by energy companies that campaigns for a switch to electrification throughout the UK economy, called for Andy Burnham to make electricity cheaper, to encourage businesses to switch and help consumers move off gas.

"He should look to make electricity cheaper - by removing levies and policy costs from existing bills - and quicken the rollout of the heating and cooking systems that run on it," she said.

Hobs: the choice

£65,000
The amount switching to induction could save a gastropub in 10 years

10C
The amount by which induction hobs can cut kitchen temperatures

21s
The time it takes to clean induction hobs. For gas hobs, it's 24 minutes

dingref.com

▲ *Chantelle Nicholson opted for electric hobs in place of gas for the opening of her restaurant, Apricity, below, in 2022. Her efforts have won Apricity a coveted Michelin Green Star* PHOTOGRAPHS: BECA B JONES//KAREN ROBINSON/THE GUARDIAN

> **'When anything goes wrong with gas, it's a nightmare to fix. Induction is really reliable'**
>
> **Chantelle Nicholson**
> *Chef and owner of Apricity*

Jeremy Pang, founder of the School of Wok

Burnham says he will crack down on rogue builders and private bailiffs

Press Association

Andy Burnham has announced a crackdown on "cowboy builders" ripping off households, and private bailiffs using intimidating tactics against people struggling with debt.

Measures will help people find trusted traders through a register and protect their money from unscrupulous operators.

Citizens Advice said home renovations were one of its biggest sources of complaints, with more than one in four adults reporting problems with their most recent project, including shoddy work and builders vanishing before completion.

A government-backed scheme being rolled out from September will allow businesses to sign up to an approved code to demonstrate they meet standards on customer service, transparency and resolving disputes.

A new payment system available from next week will also allow customers to avoid upfront costs by linking payments to project milestones.

The prime minister said: "Cowboy builders don't just rip people off. They leave families with months of stress, the disruption of unfinished work, and that horrible feeling of being taken advantage of. Not only that, but they give the vast majority of decent, hardworking tradespeople a bad name.

"So we're putting the cowboys out of business. These changes mean you'll now have the option to make sure your money is held safely and released bit by bit as the work gets done.

"It's the latest in our series of everyday fixes to give people room to breathe and make Britain fairer. We've taken on subscription traps, fake discounts, and now we're coming for the cowboy builders. Enough is enough."

The business secretary, Jonathan Reynolds, said the changes would "protect consumers, support reputable traders" and help families avoid home improvements "turning into a nightmare".

Ministers also announced tougher regulation of private bailiffs in England and Wales, including mandatory independent oversight.

The changes are intended to ensure consistent professional standards, amid concerns over enforcement agents pressuring people into repayment arrangements that left them unable to pay for daily essentials.

Private bailiffs will be required to be accredited by the Enforcement Conduct Board, or work for an accredited firm.

The courts minister, Sarah Sackman, said: "Bailiffs have an important job to do, but with that responsibility must come high standards."

First big steps

Your support means our specialists can teach children like Martha how to navigate the world with confidence.

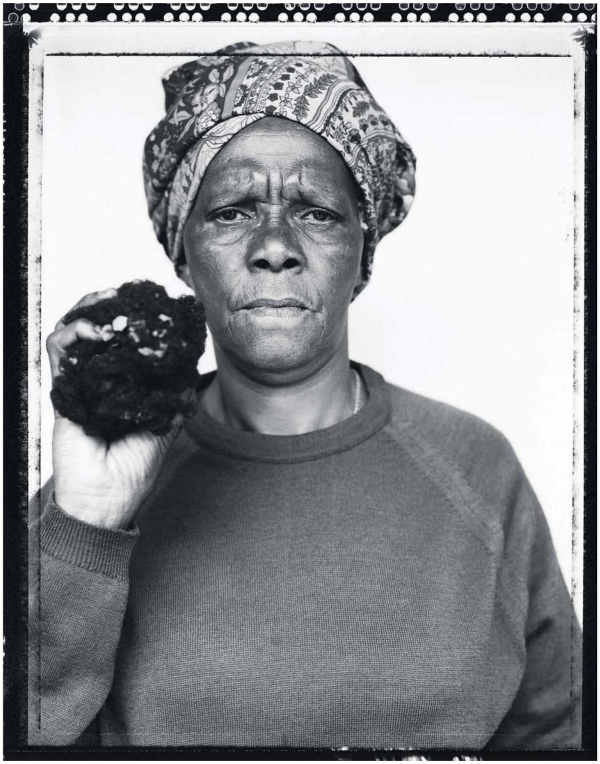
Donate now at guidedogs.org.uk

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity in England and Wales (209617), Scotland (SC038979) and Isle of Man (1334).

Guide Dogs
Life Unleashed

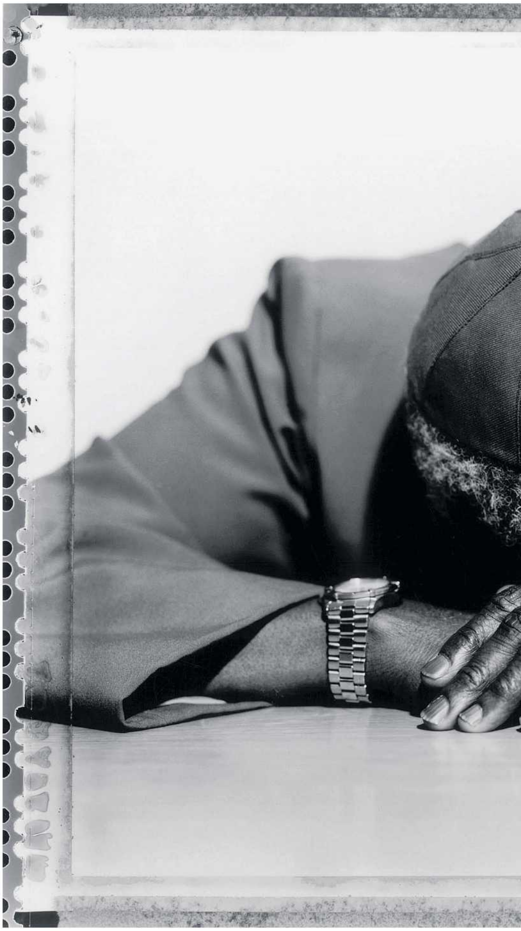
Eyewitness

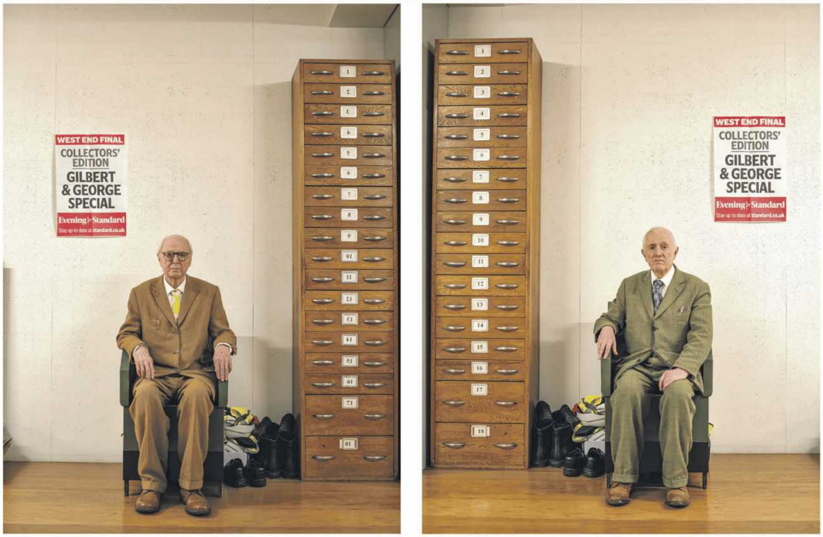


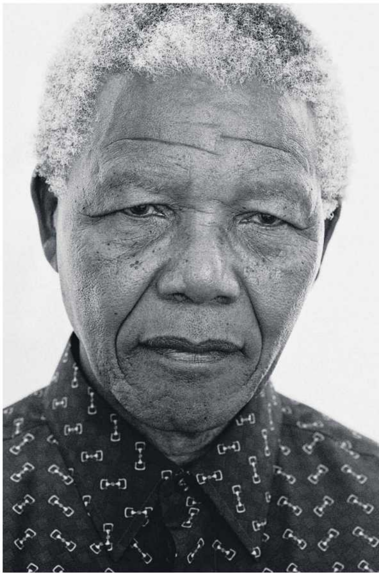
▶ Desmond Tutu at the Truth Commission HQ, Cape Town, 1999. Edelstein first met the archbishop while working as a young press photographer in Johannesburg

◀ Joyce Mtimkulu, Zwide Port Elizabeth, 1997. She is holding her dead son's hair, which fell out when he was fed rat poison by the South African police

▼ The artists Gilbert & George, London, 2014, from Affinities, Edelstein's long-running portrait series exploring collaborators

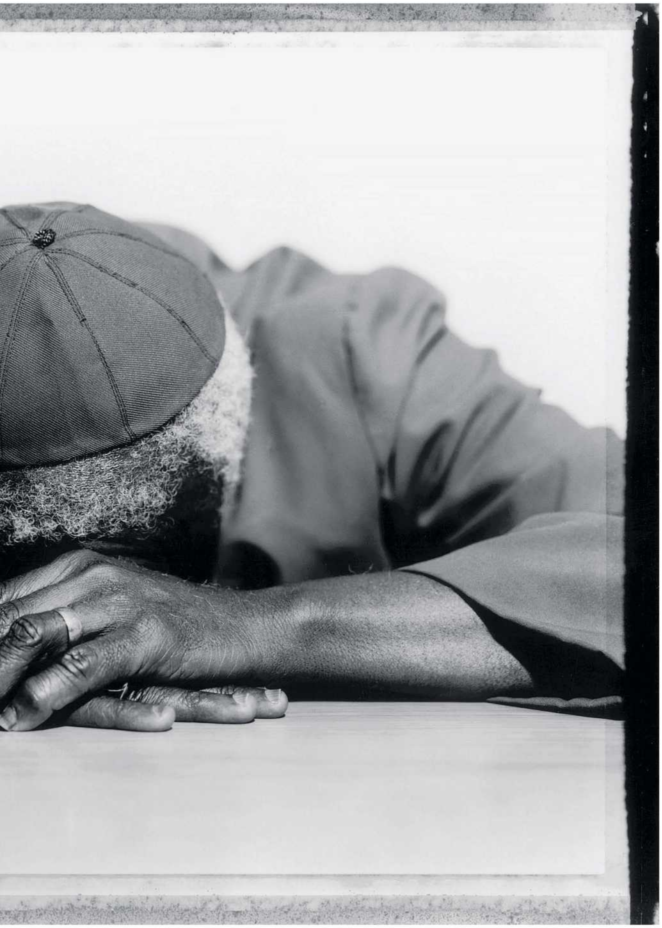



WEST END FINAL
COLLECTORS' EDITION
GILBERT & GEORGE SPECIAL
Evening Standard
Stay up to date at standard.co.uk
WEST END FINAL
COLLECTORS' EDITION
GILBERT & GEORGE SPECIAL
Evening Standard
Stay up to date at standard.co.uk

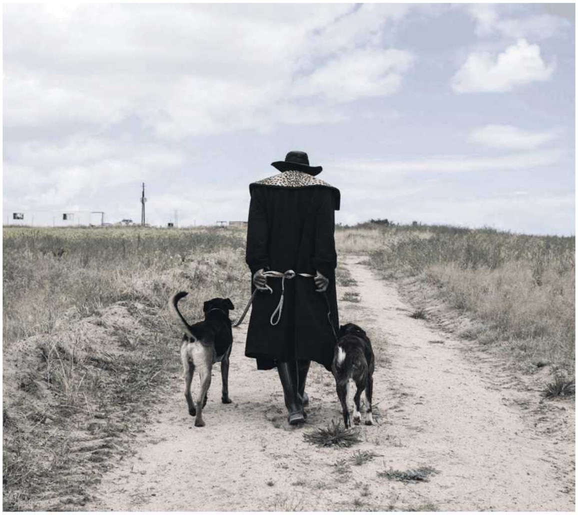


Apartheid and beyond Born in South Africa and now based in London, the internationally renowned photographer Jillian Edelstein has spent more than 40 years documenting people, communities and some of the defining moments in recent history. A new exhibition, her first major survey, includes a number of rarely seen early works. Among People is at Stills gallery, Edinburgh, until 24 October as part of Edinburgh art festival.

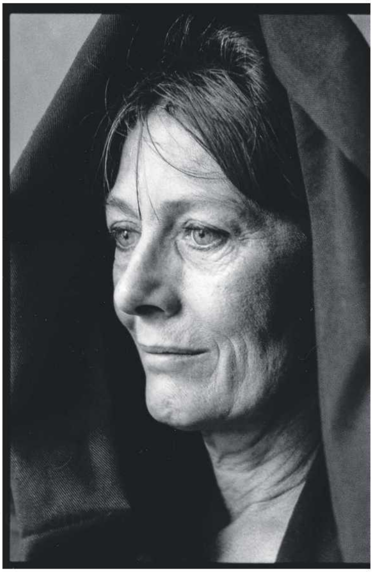
ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: JILLIAN EDELSTEIN/ STILLS GALLERY



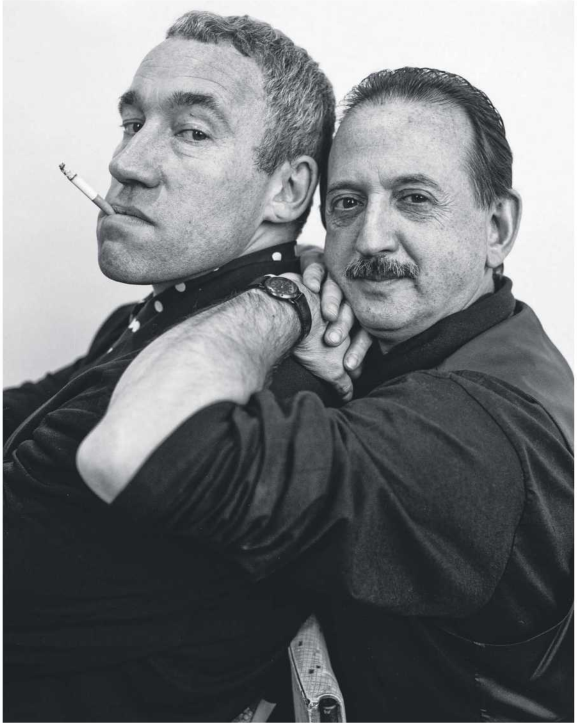
◀ *President Nelson Mandela in Tuynhuys (the presidential house in Cape Town), 1990s*



▶ *Above right, Local resident walking his dogs, between Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, Western Cape, 2018*



▶ *The actor Vanessa Redgrave, London, 2008*



▶ *The actor Simon Callow and the choreographer Stuart Hopps, London, 1991*

World

▲ *Ratko Mladić arrives at Sarajevo airport in 1993. Below, with Serbian president Slobodan Milošević*

PHOTOGRAPH: GABRIEL BOUYS/AFP/GETTY

SREBRENICA
11.07.1995.

▲ *A victim's mother protests outside Mladić's 2017 trial in The Hague*

Ratko Mladić, 'the Butcher of Bosnia', dies while serving life for genocide

Peter Beaumont
Senior international correspondent

Ratko Mladić, the infamous Serbian general who was serving a life sentence for genocide committed during the Bosnian war, has died in prison in The Hague.

Mladić had been one of the main architects of the policy of ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian war. He was convicted of genocide for orchestrating the 1995 killing of at least 8,000 Muslims in the UN-designated "safe area" Srebrenica, the worst massacre in Europe since the second world war.

Mladić, who was nicknamed "the "Butcher of Bosnia", had been in ill health after having a series of strokes.

A UN international tribunal confirmed his death. "Mladić passed away today while hospitalised in The Hague," the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals said in a statement, adding that judge Graciela Gatti Santana had ordered a full inquiry into the circumstances of his death.

Described by the former UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein as "the epitome of evil" after his conviction, Mladić was one of the most notorious figures of a war in which more than 100,000 people died and more than 1 million were left homeless.

He commanded his troops to "scorch the brains" of Bosnian Muslim people and had boasted of being a "Serbian god".

The news of Mladić's death was broken on Serbian state television after his son, Darko, had spoken earlier about his father's declining health. Mladić was sentenced by a UN tribunal to life imprisonment in 2017 over genocide and war crimes committed during Bosnia's 1990s war. He was arrested in Serbia in 2011 after 16 years on the run.

The slaughter in Srebrenica was the culmination of a brutal war that had lasted more than three years, during which Mladić oversaw the siege of Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo, which was pounded daily by artillery, tank and sniper fire, killing 10,000 people.

The goal of the Serbian leadership, which Mladić was tasked with implementing – as determined by the UN's international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – was the forcible expulsion of Bosnian Muslims, Croats and other non-Serbs to clear Bosnian land for the creation of a greater Serbia.

The tribunal found that Mladić, with the late Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and the Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadžić, were part of a criminal conspiracy to implement the plan.

"I do not recognise this court," Mladić said at an ICTY hearing on his case in 2014. When he was sentenced, he shouted: "This is all lies, you are all liars!"

The Serbian campaign culminated in the horror of Srebrenica when, after the withdrawal of Dutch UN peacekeeping forces, thousands of Bosnian men and boys were rounded up, killed and their bodies bulldozed into mass graves.

Mladić had the siege filmed to show him praising his "lads" and haranguing the UN peacekeepers who misguidedly accepted his solemn word that the inhabitants would be safe in his hands. "We give this town to the Serb people as a gift," Mladić said to the camera, claiming the victory as revenge against Muslim Turks, who had once held the area as part of the Ottoman empire.

The next day, Mladić's forces were filmed handing out sweets to children, promising their safe passage. Meanwhile, thousands of men and boys were being readied for slaughter.

When Nato tried in 1995 to rein in his forces with the threat of limited airstrikes, his troops seized UN peacekeepers as human shields, chaining them to likely targets.

The son of a second world war partisan fighter killed in 1945, Mladić was, according to his family, born in March 1943 in the tiny Bosnian village of Božanovići, putting his age at death at 83 (though official documents recorded his date of birth a year earlier, in 1942).

Mladić was an officer in the communist Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) when Yugoslavia's disintegration began in 1991.

When Bosnian Serbs rose in 1992 against Bosnia's Muslim-led secession, Mladić was chosen to command the new Bosnian Serb army that swiftly overran 70% of the country.

Dozens of towns were besieged with heavy weapons that once belonged to the JNA and villages were burned down, as 22,000 troops with the UN Protection Force stood by, more or less helplessly, under orders not to take sides.

A combination of western pressure, Nato strikes and covert US arms and training for Croats and Muslims gradually turned the tide against Mladić's army. After the war, Mladić went into hiding, with the reformists ruling post-conflict Serbia not daring to move against a man who was a hero to a core of nationalist Serbs.

Mladić continued to insist he was "a simple man" chosen to protect his people. When he was finally arrested in 2011, he put up no resistance. He had a heart attack in 2013 and seemed older than his years. By his own account, he felt like a frail old man.

Munira Subašić, from the Mothers of Srebrenica group, said she deplored that Mladić's crimes were still being denied among many Bosnian Serbs.

"Today, a major war criminal died, the criminal of the Balkans," Subašić said. But while mothers of victims "are still carrying the pain in our souls" 31 years later, "we are still listening to denials, we are still listening to how Ratko Mladić was a hero for the Serbs".

Elizabeth Evenson, international justice director at Human Rights Watch, said: "The death of Ratko Mladić … is a reminder of the ongoing need for justice, truth, and reparations in the western Balkans.

"Full accountability for such terrible crimes, in Bosnia and elsewhere, demands commitment by governments to justice, even decades after the events themselves."

Journal **Obituary** *Page 7* →

Dollywood
Fans mourn at Dolly Parton's theme park
Page 27

Slopmaker-in-chief
Trump keeps posting AI-generated images
Page 29

Ocasio-Cortez move to rejoin DSA fuels speculation of presidential run

Maya Yang

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has rejoined the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) after a seven-year lapse in her membership, amid speculation that she might run for president in 2028.

The 36-year-old New York representative, who is one of the country's most prominent democratic socialists, renewed her DSA membership after reports emerged this month that it had lapsed. Ocasio-Cortez initially joined the group in 2018.

In a statement on Tuesday night, the DSA announced: "Democratic Socialists of America confirms Rep Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a member in good standing of our organisation, having recently rejoined in August 2026," according to a report in City & State New York.

It added: "Previously, the representative joined DSA in 2018 with a one-year membership, which DSA's national leadership recently noticed had lapsed, in 2019. She has since renewed her membership as of this month."

The DSA said it had decided to disclose Ocasio-Cortez's membership details amid reports that she could run for president in the next election cycle.

The organisation's ranks have grown rapidly across the country, after a string of election victories from New York to Florida.

"While it is atypical for DSA to address the membership status of individuals, ongoing discussions about the 2028 presidential campaign have prompted this release … With chapters and members campaigning to draft Rep Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a potential presidential primary candidate, we believe that the status of her membership is essential information for members to have in their deliberations and discussions," the statement said, according to City & State New York.

The Guardian contacted the DSA for additional comment, but the organisation declined. The Guardian also contacted Ocasio-Cortez's office.

According to City & State New York, annual DSA membership cost $60 (£45) when Ocasio-Cortez joined in 2018, with members required to manually renew their dues each year. The organisation has since moved to automatic renewals and introduced a range of monthly membership options, with rates ranging from $5 to $50.

Despite Ocasio-Cortez having been a lapsed member of the DSA over the past seven years, in November 2020 the DSA offered its "congratulations to DSA member AOC on officially being re-elected to Congress" on X.

SUNRISE
SUNRISE
GREEN NEW DEAL

◀ *New York representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez initially joined the DSA in 2018 but her membership expired in 2019. She rejoined the organisation this month*
PHOTOGRAPH: EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

Similarly, in March 2024, the DSA wrote on X: "We commend DSA members Rep @CoriBush and Rep @AOC for upholding our democratic values by voting against this authoritarian legislation," referring to the then Missouri representative Cori Bush and Ocasio-Cortez voting against a TikTok ban.

This month, in an interview on ABC, the host, Jonathan Karl, asked Ocasio-Cortez whether she was still a member of DSA. She responded: "Of the New York City chapter."

"Not the national chapter?" Karl asked, to which she replied: "No."

Asked to elaborate on the distinction, Ocasio-Cortez said: "Every DSA chapter is formed locally. And so the New York City DSA chapter, those are folks that you know, it's kind of like your local union chapter."

In July 2024, the DSA withdrew its endorsement of Ocasio-Cortez at the request of NYC-DSA, according to the organisation, citing her decision to vote for a House resolution that described "denial of Israel's right to exist" as an example of antisemitism, as well as her participation in a recent panel discussion on antisemitism.

"A national DSA endorsement comes with a serious commitment to the movement for Palestine and our collective socialist project … To build a socialist movement that's capable of defeating capitalism, we must demand more from leaders in our movement," the DSA said in 2024.

It added: "This sponsorship is a deep betrayal to all those who've risked their welfare to fight Israeli apartheid and genocide through political and direct action in recent months, and in decades past."

RFK Jr lied about study of vaccines in his Senate hearings, letters show

Michelle R Smith

Newly obtained documents indicate that the US health secretary, Robert F Kennedy Jr, lied during two congressional hearings last year when he told lawmakers who held the key to his confirmation that a 2019 visit to Samoa had "nothing to do with vaccines".

Letters obtained by the Guardian and the Associated Press contradict that testimony. In one he wrote to the Samoan prime minister before the trip, Kennedy explicitly said he wanted to study the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine in the Pacific island nation. In it, he used the words "vaccine" or "vaccination" eight times.

"I am writing this letter to you in the hope that we might be helpful to the people of your great nation," he wrote, adding that he believed the deaths of two children there after an MMR vaccine could have resulted from manufacturing issues. "I would propose my team conduct detailed health informatics assessment in Samoa of what happened with your MMR vaccines," Kennedy wrote.

His Samoa visit – months before a measles outbreak swept through the island, killing 83 people – has become one of the most controversial events in his career. At the time, he was leading a non-profit organisation known for its anti-vaccine activism.

Beyond shedding light on the intent of Kennedy's visit, the letter raises questions about the health secretary's integrity and how truthful he was in testimony before Congress. During the confirmation process, Kennedy also pledged to maintain vaccine policies that, once in office, he moved to change.

Knowingly giving material false testimony to Congress is a crime that carries a possible prison sentence, though it is rarely prosecuted.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said in a statement: "Secretary Kennedy's visit to Samoa in 2019 was unrelated to vaccines. Any claim or insinuation based on these letters that secretary Kennedy lied under oath or to Congress is not only false but outright defamatory."

Kennedy was not under oath during the two confirmation hearings.

The Guardian asked HHS to provide an explanation of the contradiction between Kennedy's claim that the 2019 trip had nothing to do with vaccines and his letter to the Samoan prime minister. It did not provide any response to that question. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

▲ *Robert F Kennedy Jr said his visit to Samoa was unrelated to vaccines*

Kennedy for years was chair and chief legal counsel of the anti-vaccine group Children's Health Defense (CHD). The group turned its attention to Samoa in July 2018, when two young children died after being given an improperly mixed MMR vaccine. The two nurses involved were criminally charged the month after the children died, ultimately pleading guilty to manslaughter.

Meanwhile, the Samoan government halted all vaccinations for 10 months, until April 2019. Vaccination rates plummeted.

During that time, CHD started contacting the Samoan government, according to emails previously obtained by the Guardian and the AP as the result of a freedom of information lawsuit against the US state department brought with the aid of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

In the letter from Kennedy, dated 20 January 2019, he addressed the then prime minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, and speculated that the deaths in Samoa may have been caused by issues with different vaccine lots. Writing on CHD letterhead, he said his team wanted to evaluate if that was the case through a "detailed health informatics assessment".

He expressed his belief that it was difficult and time consuming in most of the world to investigate "adverse health events associated with vaccines".

The prime minister responded a month later, saying Samoa could benefit from CHD's assessment of MMR vaccines. In a separate email from Kennedy's CHD colleague Dr Michael Graven to Samoan officials in May 2019, Graven wrote that the team was travelling there as part of a vaccine-related "mission".

Kennedy, Graven and Kennedy's wife, the actor Cheryl Hines, took their trip to Samoa in May and June of that year. By then, vaccinations had resumed and Samoa's top health official had publicly announced that human error, not a vaccine issue, was responsible for the children's deaths.

Months later, with vaccination rates still dangerously low, measles broke out, killing 83 people, mostly children under five.

Under questioning during Senate confirmation hearings, Kennedy repeatedly denied the trip had anything to do with vaccines. The Senate confirmed Kennedy on a 52-48 vote. The federal statute of limitations for lying to Congress is five years, meaning a new justice department under the next president in 2029 could theoretically investigate the case.

Dr Food's secret ingredients

Downfall of drug-dealing TikTok star

William Christou
Beirut

Known to his 8.7m TikTok followers as Dr Food, Georges Dib was a popular Lebanese food influencer who would hold giveaways, post behind-the-scenes tours of his food production facilities and wax philosophical about the ingredients of success.

But Lebanese authorities allege that when the camera was off, the chef was living a double life. For months they sought his arrest on charges of international drug trafficking and production, accusing him of hiding narcotics in his pastries.

On Sunday, security forces finally managed to track him down to a house in Akkar, north Lebanon, after months of surveillance.

Dib had been sentenced in absentia last month to life imprisonment with hard labour for drug trafficking. Investigators alleged they had found drugs hidden in his branded chocolates and biscuits, intended to be shipped abroad.

> *'He'd broadcast live, then change his car, mobile and his house'*
>
> **Security source**
> *Lebanon*

The accusation was tied to a 2024 drug bust in which 820kg (1,800lb) of hashish was found hidden in cakes. A warrant had already been issued for his arrest, though it had previously been suspected he was outside the country.

Despite the charges and warrant, Dr Food evaded authorities for a year and a half, continuing to post videos on his TikTok page without addressing the allegations against him. In one video, he filmed himself on Beirut's Corniche asking any of his followers who had been displaced by the Israel-Hezbollah war what food they missed, so that he could deliver it to them.

Less than two weeks ago, Dr Food filmed himself in what appeared to be one of his food production facilities, showing his followers how he made cheese.

"He would broadcast live [videos] and directly after … he would change his car and mobile and his house," said a Lebanese security source. Ultimately, the source said, his videos helped authorities to track him down.

Lebanese authorities have tried to crack down on the country's reputation as a drug-smuggling hub in recent months, tightening controls at Beirut international airport and the port.

Lebanon has faced pressure from the Arab Gulf, the main market for drugs in the Middle East, and the US, which wanted tighter checks to stop goods travelling to Hezbollah. The country has a long history with drug smuggling as gangs exploited its porous borders, militias and weak government to move drugs.

▲ *Georges Dib attracted followers on TikTok for his culinary skills while hiding his drug trafficking operation*

820kg

Weight of hashish found hidden in Dr Food's cakes during a 2024 drugs seizure by the Lebanese authorities

During Syria's civil war, hashish and captagon, a catch-all name for an amphetamine cocktail, would transit into Lebanon's Bekaa valley and through the country's port.

Saudi Arabia halted the trade of fruit and vegetables with Lebanon in 2021, cutting off access for Lebanese produce to much of the Gulf market, after repeated shipments were found to be a front to smuggle captagon. Fake vegetables were being used as containers for the pills. Since the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the former Syrian president, in December 2024, captagon production has shifted towards Lebanon, with drugs flowing from there into Syria rather than the reverse.

In May 2024, Lebanese authorities uncovered an alleged child trafficking ring run through TikTok. They said a group of 30 traffickers would lure children through private messages, then sell photos of them being abused on the dark web. One of the most public figures alleged to be involved with the paedophile ring was a barber with thousands of followers on TikTok. On 31 July Lebanese courts found six men and one woman guilty of taking part in the sexual abuse ring. Sentences ranged from four years to life in prison.

No Pep,
same
spark?

Get the whole picture with our unrivalled Premier League analysis and podcasts.

Search for the Guardian football

The Guardian
The whole picture

▼ *Dolly Parton at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, April 1993. It is now the area's biggest employer* PHOTOGRAPH: RON GALELLA/GETTY IMAGES

'She taught us to dream big'

Sadness and pride at Dollywood, Parton's love letter to her roots

Becca Andrews
Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

Becky Bullard was on the way home to Austin, Texas, when she heard the news. "As soon as I heard about Dolly, I thought of you," read a text from a close friend while she waited for her flight home from Albany, New York. "And I was like: 'Heard what?'" Bullard recalled, her eyes widening.

She had a connecting flight through Charlotte, North Carolina, and after discovering the news decided to rent a car and drive nearly four hours to Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, to pay homage to Dolly Parton, the larger-than-life country music superstar who died on Tuesday at 80, shortly after being diagnosed with cancer.

Bullard knew she needed to go all out. She already had white cowboy boots, but she was missing that signature Parton sparkle. She found a gold-sequined dress at an antique shop, and added red lipstick and gold earrings that read "DOLLY" in script.

"Everything I wear usually is like sequins and fringe and rhinestones and all the things," Bullard said. "And I don't think that I would have given myself permission to express in that way [without Dolly]."

Bullard, who said Parton's unapologetic nature had helped her demand to be taken seriously as a woman in the world, was among thousands who flocked to the star's 65-hectare (160-acre) theme park on Wednesday to pay tribute.

Dollywood, which opened in 1986 just miles from Parton's home town, draws more than 4 million visitors annually. Parton, who grew up in poverty in east Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains, had told Barbara Walters in a 1982 interview that she intended to open a theme park, "a fantasy city, sort of like Disneyland, but like a mountain Disneyland".

She was successful in that vision. In addition to rollercoasters and other rides, the park is filled with vendors dedicated to Appalachian craftsmanship, including leather workers, herbalists and bakers. There is a chapel for quiet moments of reflection. There are museums dedicated to Parton's career and her philanthropy, and butterfly iconography at every turn. The park is a manifestation of the Parton ethos that bigger is always best, but at its heart it's a love letter to the region that raised her.

"I always thought that if I made it big or got successful at what I had started out to do, that I wanted to come back to my part of the country and do something great, something that would bring a lot of jobs into this area," Parton said in an interview with the Associated Press in 2010.

On Wednesday, a memorial at the park's entrance held bouquets of flowers, letters, drawings and other tributes to the singer. A pair of Velour-brand false eyelashes in their packaging were tucked behind a jar of sunflowers, and in a bold pen a mourner had written: "Cried these off! From Texas." A letter from a family, presumably written before news of her death broke, described the mother's decision to name her newborn Parton for the woman who "exuded warmth, integrity and grit". A photograph of the baby was included.

Dollywood is the largest employer in Sevier county, with about 4,000 people on the payroll, according to the park president, Eugene Naughton. "Everyone's worried about, oh, what's going to happen now that Dolly's gone, and I can assure that we're carrying her light forward," Naughton said. "She taught us how to dream big, so we have very ambitious plans on a moving-forward basis that I know she'll be proud of."

Savannah Duncan, a 19-year-old Parton fan, said the park atmosphere on Wednesday was solemn. "I walked in and you could just feel it," she said. "Everyone's been hit hard here." Duncan, who is pursuing a degree in psychology, said Parton had inspired her as a girl who grew up in Appalachia.

"The over-the-top, the wig, the rhinestones – it inspires you to be yourself," she said. "And she's very proud of Appalachia – we're under-appreciated, a very poor region, and she's never strayed from her pride." Duncan admired Parton's rebellion against the gendered expectations of the conservative south. "You know, in this area they try to tone you down, tell you what you can be and what you can't be," she said. "Especially living in Appalachia, people underestimate you and your intelligence, but she proved we can do anything."

Ashley and Cynthia Pandolfo were visiting the region from Philadelphia, taking a "mountain vacation" at their six-year-old son's behest, and they weren't initially sure they would venture into the theme park. But when they heard about Parton's death, they felt compelled to visit. As they made their way through the park, their son asked why they kept seeing people who were crying. "We told him it was just, you don't meet, you don't see a lot of truly nice people," Ashley Pandolfo said. "It's sad to lose a really nice person."

The women appreciated Parton's unrelenting support of the queer community and her dedication to a spirit of acceptance. As a gay couple they had been a little nervous to travel to the south. "We were like, 'This is one place that I feel like we would feel OK,'" Cynthia said.

Barbara Ammons, 45, from nearby Etowah, wore a T-shirt emblazoned with Dolly's face that she had bought when she visited Dollywood two weeks earlier with her sister. She carried a small bouquet of flowers to place at the memorial before she had to go to work. "I'd cry and then I'd stop and then I'd cry and then I'd stop and then I had to get ready to go to work and I was like, I cannot keep doing this," she said with a sad chuckle.

She wiped at her left eye and said: "It just doesn't seem like we should be without her."

Images of butterflies abound in Dollywood

> ***'Living here, people underestimate you and your intelligence, but she proved we can do anything'***
>
> **Savannah Duncan**
> *Teenage fan*

▲ *Tributes to Dolly Parton left by a statue of the singer outside the Sevier county courthouse in Tennessee* PHOTOGRAPH: MELISSA SUE GERRITS/GETTY IMAGES

Climate breakdown

Cheesemakers face struggle to survive after French drought

Angelique Chrisafis
Paris

Strict production rules will be loosened for some of France's most famous cheeses after drought and repeated heatwaves dried out grazing pastures, threatening the livelihoods of dairy workers.

Comté, a hard cheese made from raw cows' milk in the Jura mountains, is France's top-selling traditional cheese, with more than 62,000 tonnes produced last year. The government announced on Wednesday that its producers would be granted a temporary change to strict rules on grazing after farmers said extreme heat had scorched their pastures.

Makers of beaufort and abondance, two cheeses made from cows grazed in the Alps, were also granted temporary changes to production rules because of the impact of the drought on land.

All three cheeses carry the coveted label "*appellation d'origine protégée*" (AOP, protected designation of origin) to ensure their authenticity and protect traditional farming methods. This means producers must follow rigid rules on where their animals graze and what they eat.

But the drought, which affected 95% of mainland France in July, has left normally rich green pastures dry, yellow and bare. French authorities said makers of comté, beaufort and abondance could temporarily supplement the animals' diet with more fodder and grain brought in from elsewhere.

The National Institute of Origin and Quality, the government agency that administers and enforces rules on traditional food production, told Agence France-Presse it was also planning to grant temporary relief for the producers of several other cheeses, including reblochon, cantal, bleu d'Auvergne, and fourme d'Ambert.

◀ *The French government has relaxed grazing regulations for makers of traditional French cheeses such as comté, below, after intense heatwaves left pastures bare*
PHOTOGRAPHS: HEMIS/DIDIER ZYLBERYNG/ALAMY

> ***'There really is no grass left to eat, this grass is totally scorched and has no value'***
>
> **Hubert Genty**
> *Dairy farmer*

Droughts are becoming more common and severe in some parts of the world, including Europe, the fastest-warming continent, owing to human-caused climate breakdown.

Hubert Genty, a dairy farmer who produces neufchâtel cheese in Richemont in Normandy, said: "There really is no grass left to eat, this grass is totally scorched and has no value." He told the TF1 TV channel his cows were producing less milk, which in turn would affect cheese production.

His wife, Angélique, who makes the heart-shaped cheeses by hand in the farm's dairy, said she usually made 600-700 cheeses a day at this time of year but was now down to making 400-450 because of the low milk yield. She said she would struggle to meet customers' demands.

Farmers in many traditional French cheesemaking areas have warned about the damage of the drought and heatwaves. About 70% of producers of salers cheese, which has a protected AOP label, had to pause production over the summer because of the drought, the local newspaper La Montagne reported. Makers of roquefort have also called for a temporary easing on their rules on grazing sheep.

The French agriculture ministry's statistical service said growth on permanent grasslands measured on 10 August was one-third lower than the 1989-2018 average. The fodder situation was "highly degraded" in almost all regions, the ministry said this month.

The agriculture minister, Annie Genevard, is expected to hold crisis talks with local authorities next week before announcing emergency measures for farmers.

The vegetable sector has been particularly affected. The French union of potato farmers, the UNPT, warned this week of a slump, saying it expected a 23% drop in this year's crop "after five successive heatwaves and an exceptional lack of water".

In the northern Hauts-de-France, a key potato-producing region, farmers said potatoes were much smaller than usual, raising concerns among local factories that produce chips, crisps and processed mashed potato.

Cider makers have voiced concerns about this year's apple yield, and for many wine producers the grape harvest has begun early, amid uncertainty over the quantity of wine that will be produced.

Kit lost by mountaineer 60 years ago recovered after glacier melts

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

An 86-year-old mountaineer has been reunited with his backpack and climbing equipment after the kit emerged from a melting glacier in Austria – more than 60 years after he was forced to leave them there.

Items including an ice axe, camera and a pipe dating from the 1950s or 1960s were discovered on the Sulztalferner glacier in Austria's Tyrol region, at 2,955 metres (9,700ft) above sea level, by a hiker in July.

Austrian police began an investigation and through heavily frayed documents found in the backpack discovered the owner's name and tracked him down.

The man had fallen into the crevasse while crossing the glacier with friends in August 1963.

The group were held together by a rope, so his friends were able to pull him free. Police said to reduce his weight he had removed his backpack and thrown it into the crevasse.

They did not publicly name the man but said he was too ill to collect the items. They were returned to him via his son.

The accelerating retreat of European glaciers, which scientists say is primarily driven by human-caused global heating, has revealed a vast array of relics, ancient ecosystems and human remains in recent decades.

In 2015 a barracks where Italian troops had sheltered while fighting the Austro-Hungarian army during the white war – a battle waged across Alpine terrain during the first world war – was discovered on Mount Scorluzzo, a peak overlooking the Stelvio pass.

The bodies of dozens of soldiers, some still in their uniforms, have emerged from the melting ice within the past 20 years.

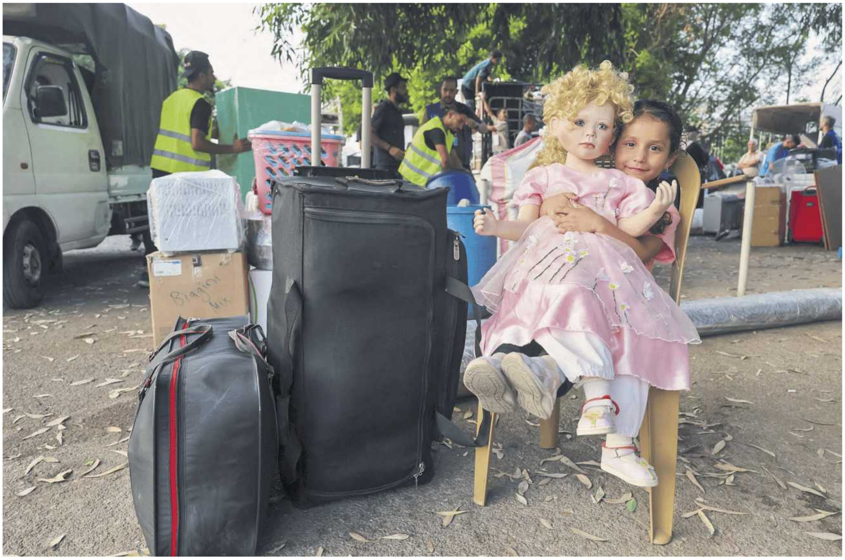
The most extraordinary discovery of human remains on a melting glacier was made in 1991, when two German hikers found the 5,300-year-old mummified body of a hunter in the Ötztal Alps, close to Italy's border with Austria.

The body of "Ötzi the Iceman", replete with tattoos, is on display at a museum in Bolzano.

▶ *The hiker, far right, with backpack in the Austrian Alps in 1963. His belongings came to light after glacier ice melted, and police identified him via frayed documents in the bag*
PHOTOGRAPHS: LANDESPOLIZEIDIREKTION TIROL

2,955
The altitude in metres (9,700ft) at which the backpack with ice axe, camera and pipe was found

Precious possession
A Syrian girl among about 120 refugees leaving Beirut for their home country, according to the Lebanese general security directorate. As of 31 July, the UN refugee agency has helped about 83,880 Syrians to return home from Lebanon.



PHOTOGRAPH: WAEL HAMZEH/EPA

Slopmaker-in-chief

Trump uses AI to 'meet' Washington in ballroom

Adam Gabbatt

Donald Trump knows the power of an image - of himself, with everyone from Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un to Kim Kardashian. How about George Washington?

As the US president struggles to end his war with Iran, and with his approval ratings hitting the lowest levels of his second term, he has in recent weeks posted a series of AI-generated images of himself alongside historical figures.

Facing tough questions over reports of poor living conditions and morale aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln and his efforts to reach a deal with Tehran, Trump has turned to his Truth Social platform to post images apparently designed to bolster his legacy.

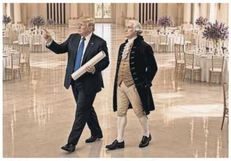
Earlier this month, he posted an AI image of himself and Washington standing side by side in what appears to be an imagining of Trump's completed White House ballroom. A minute later, he posted three more AI pictures of himself and Washington in the ballroom.

Trump wasn't done. The next day, he posted an AI image of himself and Washington sitting at a table, holding quills over what appears to be a map. Three minutes later, he posted an image of the pair on horseback - Washington on a white horse, Trump on a black horse.

Still, it was Sunday's post that was the most striking: a video that showed Washington and Trump walking through the ballroom, taking turns to point to the ceiling, as if appraising the room's construction.

"I think part of the reason he's posting it is because it ties in with this deeper sentiment that he has that he is on par with, or even potentially better than, George Washington," said Angelo Carusone, president and CEO of Media Matters, a non-profit watchdog organisation.

"He's trying to basically be a founder," he added. "And AI gives him the ability to project his imagination out into the world."



▲ *Trump has posted AI images and a video of himself with Washington*

The Guardian asked the White House whether Trump, 80, thought he had actually met Washington. A spokesperson did not directly address the question, but responded: "Truth Social is the most powerful and popular social media platform in the world because it serves as President Trump's authentic voice, where he communicates directly with the American people and the world without the biased media taking him out of context."

"Every day in Washington DC, the city changes and gets more Trump-branded," Carusone said. "That is the analogue to Washington: there are all these things named after him, but that happened posthumously. With Trump, it's almost like he's building a living mausoleum."

Trump's ballroom has at times appeared to be among his main interests during his second term. The president has openly admitted he wants the ballroom to serve as a "legacy project", and when the going gets tough this seems to be a topic to which he retreats.

Surrogate gives birth to twins with different sets of parents

Ben Smee
Queensland state correspondent

A Queensland woman gave birth to twin children with separate sets of biological parents last year, in what is believed to be a first in Australia - a situation so rare it had not been contemplated by state surrogacy laws.

The woman, whose identity is withheld in a court judgment, conceived an unplanned natural pregnancy about the same time as she received an IVF embryo transfer under a surrogacy arrangement with another couple.

Both children were born on the same day in November 2025. There has been no dispute about the children's parentage - both have been raised separately during the past 10 months by their respective biological parents.

But the situation has required a complex case in the Queensland children's court because surrogacy rules were written to ban situations where "birth siblings" born from surrogate pregnancies were separated.

The court ultimately ruled that while the children were "gestational twins", they were not birth siblings for the purpose of surrogacy laws, and made an order that formalised the parentage of the biological parents.

According to the judgment, the couples involved entered into an "altruistic" surrogacy arrangement after being connected by friends. One couple, referred to as BNJ and DRJ in the court judgment, had been unable to conceive a natural child because BNJ was born without a uterus.

They met DZ and FZ, who had five children. DZ agreed to become a surrogate and had IVF in April 2025.

About two weeks later, an ultrasound identified that DZ was carrying two foetuses. Subsequent testing revealed that one child, a girl, was the biological child of BNJ and DRJ, and that the other, a boy, was the biological child of DZ and FZ.

Judge Jodie Woodridge KC ruled that "in the unique circumstances" the boy and girl were not birth siblings and that the act did not prevent the order sought by both sets of parents.

Call for calm after malaria kills two Frankfurt airport workers

Kate Connolly
Berlin

German health officials are seeking to reassure the public after two workers at the country's biggest airport died of malaria.

Mosquito traps have been set up at Frankfurt airport and a mosquito monitoring process is under way. A detailed investigation is being conducted to clarify how the workers contracted the disease.

Since last month, a total of six people are known to have caught malaria tropica - the most severe and dangerous form of malaria - in connection with their work at the airport.

Of the two that have died, one began getting ill at the start of July, the other in mid-August. The four other people who were infected have been treated in hospital, but are now out of danger, according to Frankfurt's public health department, which is working closely with the airport's operator, Fraport.

Letters have been sent to all contracted workers to raise awareness of symptoms, while doctors in the vicinity are being warned to be extra vigilant, especially if dealing with patients with unexplained fever who worked near the airport.

In a statement on its website the health department acknowledged the existence of "airport malaria" - when mosquitos from malaria-endemic areas are transported in flight cabins, or in the baggage hold - but said it was a "very rare occurrence".

Owing to the rarity, malaria could easily be overlooked and diagnosis delayed, increasing the chance of death, it said, and human-to-human transmission was impossible.

In this case, the Robert Koch Institute of public health believes the infection was transmitted by an *Anopheles* mosquito imported by plane. Fraport confirmed that mosquito traps had been set up in and around the airport, and that mosquitoes had been caught. These are being examined in a tropical medicine laboratory in Antwerp, Belgium.

> *'Not everyone with a fever should assume they have malaria'*
>
> **Peter Tinnemann**
> *Public health official*

Peter Tinnemann, the head of the Frankfurt health department, told the broadcaster Hessische Rundfunk: "The mosquito is probably already dead."

He said the risk to the population of Frankfurt was low. "Not everyone should assume that just because they have a headache, fever and non-specific symptoms they are now infected with malaria," he said.

Save up to
31%
on retail price

All the must-sees and don't bothers

Subscribe to every cultural recommendation for up to 31% less.
Subscribe to the Guardian.

Save up to 31% on the retail price when you subscribe

Scan the QR code or visit
theguardian.com/newspapersubscription

With your print + digital subscription, you can:

- ✓ Save up to 31% on the Six day package or up to 12% on the Saturday only package
- ✓ Collect in store or home delivery
- ✓ Enjoy unlimited digital access
- ✓ Support independent journalism
- ✓ Pause your print subscription anytime

Saving shown is the saving per month against the retail price. New subscribers, UK residents 18+ only. Pause delivery or collection for 5 weeks max per year. Full package details, delivery areas and participating stores on our website. Subscription T&Cs apply, see: theguardian.com/subscription/terms

The Guardian

FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
↘	↘	↗	↘		
-85.58	-40.50	+212.20	-130.18	1.1663	1.3582
10792.54	5826.09	53676.08	66131.98	-0.0005	-0.0006

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

City firms rush to clear cases of harassment ahead of new rules

Kalyeena Makortoff
Banking correspondent

The City's largest hedge funds, insurers and pension funds are racing to prepare for sweeping rules that will stop nearly 40,000 companies hiding bullying and harassment cases from the financial watchdog.

From the start of next month, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) will expand a crackdown on bad behaviour in the banking industry to a wider group of City investment firms and brokers.

Companies will be expected to report any serious cases of non-financial misconduct to the regulator. The firms will also be required to pass on reports of bad behaviour – including racism, sexual harassment, violence and intimidation – to a manager's prospective future employer. It is hoped that the rules will prevent cases of "rolling bad apples", where rogue bosses move to new firms without facing consequences.

"The countdown is now on for regulated firms to be ready for the new rules taking effect in September," said Jill Lorimer, a partner at the law firm Kingsley Napley who focuses on financial regulation. "We are aware of firms brushing up their policies and procedures in this area and ensuring training has been thoroughly refreshed and completed.

"Firms dealing with allegations against their people now may want to ensure that these processes are wrapped up before the new regime takes effect. The FCA will no doubt be looking for cases in this area to show it is willing to flex its muscles.

"The City should take these changes very seriously indeed, as no firm will want to be the target of high-profile regulatory attention."

▲ *Ex-boss of Lloyd's of London John Neal failed to disclose a relationship*

The rules will apply to any company bound by the FCA's senior managers and certification regime, which holds top bosses accountable for wrongdoing. It comes despite resistance from City firms and some politicians who complain red tape in the financial industry is holding back UK investment, jobs and growth.

However, recent misconduct cases have strengthened the argument that cleaning up the financial sector could create a competitive advantage for Britain, particularly for an industry long criticised for a boys' club culture.

That includes the case at Lloyd's of London, where it was revealed in July that its former boss John Neal had failed to disclose a "close relationship" with a female colleague. The insurance market operator also said that whistleblower reports dating back to 2023 had been mishandled, in a breach of its own governance rules.

A recent court battle against the former Barclays chief executive Jes Staley also appears to have strengthened the FCA's resolve. Last year, judges upheld an FCA decision to ban Staley from holding any senior finance industry role after he was found to have misled the regulator over the nature of his relationship with the convicted child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The FCA is hoping for similar success in a court battle with the hedge fund boss Crispin Odey. The Brexit-backing investor is trying to overturn a ban on holding senior roles in the UK financial industry after the FCA said he had deliberately tried to frustrate an inquiry into allegations of sexual harassment against him.

A Financial Times investigation has reported allegations against Odey of sexual assault and harassment from 20 women. Odey has denied those allegations. He also said in a witness statement that he had not tried to prevent an investigation, and had been treated unfairly by the FCA.

An FCA spokesperson said the new rules "will help industry take a more consistent approach. But the primary responsibility for preventing and dealing with this behaviour remains with firms."

Heatwaves lift Halfords profit in first half of year by £5m

Alex Daniel

▲ *Strong demand for bikes and cycling equipment helped Halfords exceed its expected performance*

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY LIVE

A surge in demand for air conditioning during the summer heatwaves has prompted Halfords to lift its profit forecasts.

Shares surged by about 10% after the bike and car parts retailer raised its profit forecast for the year, partly in the wake of scorching summer weather that drove demand for its air conditioning services.

The company said it has seen "strong demand in seasonal categories" that was "in part reflecting unusually warm summer weather".

According to a Halfords spokesperson, this included demand for maintenance services on the air conditioning system in cars, known as a "regas", along with cycling and touring and camping equipment.

Analysts at Peel Hunt, one of Halfords' brokers, lifted its share price target for the company from 225p to 285p. It said the warm weather had added around £5m to its profit in the first half of the year, with "extremely strong" sales in the three cited categories.

"Of course, this may be difficult to replicate next year, when presumably the weather will normalise, but it is in the bag for this year now, and this incremental £5m is at the heart of our upgrade," added Peel Hunt.

The update follows Britain's hottest and driest summer in years, with five heatwaves and drought declared across large parts of England and Wales.

The retailer said that it now expected annual profit of between £55m and £65m, above the £52.6m analysts had forecast, lifting its shares to 265p, and the top of the FTSE 250 share index yesterday morning.

Halfords said the rest of the upgrade had come from "continued momentum" in its core business as it pushes ahead with a turnaround plan under Henry Birch, the chief executive.

Ben Hunt, a retail analyst at Panmure Liberum, said there was a "clear underlying improvement" in Halfords' performance.

He said: "Longer term we expect momentum to be sustained by further benefits from Fusion garage conversions, the return of the cycling replacement cycle and the rollout of Fusion learnings across the wider Autocentres estate.

"With tyres finally showing signs of stabilisation and operational expenditure growth moderating, all areas of the P&L [profit and loss] are now moving in the same direction."

Call-blocking firm fined for its nuisance cold calling

Alex Daniel

A company that made its money promising to protect older people from nuisance calls has been fined £190,000 for "hounding" them with hundreds of thousands of nuisance calls of its own.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) said Elderly Aids Ltd, a company selling call-blocking devices, made 758,053 cold calls between May 2024 and February 2025 to try to sell its products.

About 20 complaints were made to the ICO and the Telephone Preference Service (TPC) – a service that prevents people's telephone numbers being shared – some of which said callers were aggressive, misleading and often failed to identify themselves.

One complainant said they were "overcharging for call-blocking services that they aren't authorised to sell – my father was persuaded to sign up to pay £139 upfront and a £6.99 monthly fee".

The ICO described Elderly Aids' actions as "bombarding people with the very nuisance calls it claimed to protect them from".

When the ICO started investigating the company, Elderly Aids repeatedly ignored requests for information while continuing to cold call people, the ICO said.

The company also attempted to strike itself off the Companies House register once it became aware it was under scrutiny and is now registered at a default address.

Andy Curry, the head of investigations at the ICO, said: "Not only did this company target vulnerable people who had explicitly asked not to be called – they harassed them to sell call-blocking devices.

"EAL showed a complete disregard for the law and the people they were hounding. This penalty should serve as a clear warning to any business that thinks the law does not apply to them – we will hold them to account for both exploiting people in this way and trying to avoid accountability."

Alongside the fine, the ICO also ordered Elderly Aids to stop making illegal marketing calls.

It is illegal to make a marketing call to someone who is registered with the TPS unless the person has informed the specific company that they are happy to take calls from them.

Russell Roach, the director of preference services at the Data & Marketing Association, said: "Anyone making live marketing calls must respect the choices people have made about their privacy."

UK vehicle output falls amid export decline and summer shutdowns

Julia Kollewe

Car and van production in the UK fell last month because of weaker exports and routine summer shutdowns.

Vehicle production fell 11.6% year on year in July to 63,655 units, according to the latest figures, published today by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. Exports were down 15.9% to 47,377 vehicles, the industry body said.

Car production declined 10.6% to 61,767 units, as a 9.3% rise in output for UK buyers failed to offset a 15.8% fall in exports. Shipments to all major markets fell, including the EU (-15.2%), US (-17.7%), Turkey (-18.5%), China (-36.9%) and Japan (-24.4%).

Commercial vehicle output fell 34.4% to 1,888 units, with deliveries to UK customers and export markets down 49.6% and 18.5% respectively. Electrified cars were a bright spot, with fully electric and hybrid models recording the year's first monthly increase, up 6.8% to 25,678 units.

So far this year, UK factories have turned out just under 450,000 cars and commercial vehicles, down 8.1% on the same period in 2025.

Railways How can Britain's train tracks cope with extreme temperatures?

Natalie Wint
Alex Daniel

Britain's railways have faced a string of heat-related problems this summer, including a derailment near Lewes in East Sussex earlier in August and another the next day at Wickford railway station in Essex.

The problems came during one of the hottest and driest summers on record. Here's what we know about how heat affects the rail network - and how to tackle it.

What happens to railways in the heat?

Steel expands when it gets hot, and the long sections of welded steel that make up modern railway tracks are no exception.

"The classic concern for railways with hot weather is that the track might buckle," said William Powrie, a professor of engineering at the University of Southampton.

As temperatures rise, the rails expand, but their continuous design means there is little room for movement.

"If they haven't got anywhere to go, they end up generating compressive stresses," Powrie said. "The problem with any sort of structure which has got a compression in it is that it can fail by buckling."

The consequences can be serious. Two days of record heat in 2022 alone led to almost 7,700 cancelled trains and an estimated £30m in costs, according to a taskforce set up by Network Rail. On a hot day, the rail can reach much higher temperatures than the air.

Network Rail said most of the network could operate when track temperatures reached up to 46C, roughly an air temperature of 30C. But rails have been recorded at temperatures as high as 51C.

The sleepers and ballast that rails sit on can help stop them from buckling, keeping the track in place - but long periods of heat and drought can dry the soil beneath.

How do hot countries cope?

To stop rails buckling, engineers lay them slightly stretched: a process called pre-stressing. It means the rail has some give in it before it starts expanding in the heat.

In the UK, rails are stretched so they do not have tension until the air temperature passes 27C. That figure sits between the UK's highest and lowest seasonal rail temperatures, protecting against buckling in the summer and breaking in the winter.

Other countries set that figure differently. In parts of Australia and the US, the so-called stress-free air temperature can exceed 35C. In southern Europe, where winters rarely get as cold as in the UK, rails are designed for more heat.

One option, in theory, could be to re-stress rails between seasons, loosening and re-tensioning them so the stress-free temperature is set higher for summer and lower for winter, rather than fixed year-round.

Network Rail said: "In Britain, the variations in short-term weather and long-term climate mean that it is neither practical nor cost-effective to implement these measures permanently."

What can be done?

One idea under discussion is raising the temperature British rails are built to withstand. The post-2022 taskforce said that on modern, well-supported track, the stress-free temperature could rise from 27C to 30C.

"You might say we should actually have a different stress-free temperature in the south of England compared to, say, the north of Scotland," Powrie said. However, a higher stress-free temperature also leaves rails more vulnerable in a cold snap.

Simpler measures are already in use. Some sections of track are painted white to reduce how much heat they absorb. Network Rail said a rail painted white was typically 5-10C cooler.

Did the Lewes derailment happen because of the heat?

It's impossible to say. An interim report by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) found a "track geometry irregularity" had existed before the derailment, and said investigators had since received reports of rough riding from passengers on that stretch.

At the site of the derailment, the embankment is built on clay, which shrinks more than other types of soil as it dries out. RAIB said the clay was "sensitive to variations in water content", and there was evidence it had shifted before the derailment, though not enough to amount to a significant slip.

The derailment also happened on a bend - where more force is exerted on the track - and close to where the track leaves a bridge and moves on to the embankment.

Network Rail has said it is "fully committed to supporting the continuing investigation and acting on any lessons that emerge from its findings".

YOUR CAFÉ
Own the daily grind
The UK's number one commercial property destination
All claims can be verified at rightmove.co.uk/claims
rightmove commercial

▲ *Eryn Lawley studied politics but is now training to be a bookbinder at Ludlow Bookbinders in Shropshire*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW FOX/THE GUARDIAN

AI-proof

Hands-on jobs attract young workers

Lauren Almeida

It's a bleak moment for young people entering the workforce for the first time. For decades, a university degree seemed to promise a stable career – but entry-level white-collar jobs across almost all sectors are being disrupted by AI. Budding accountants, software engineers and junior lawyers increasingly find themselves displaced by cheap automation.

Even creative fields are struggling against AI tech that can produce artwork, lengthy prose or complex design briefs in seconds.

So, many young workers have responded by turning to what they see as "AI-proof" heritage crafts. These are the centuries-old, hands-on jobs, such as boatbuilding, metalwork or bookbinding, that require specialist knowledge built on creative judgment and dexterity, skills not yet mastered by AI.

Eryn Lawley, a 27-year-old politics graduate, said future-proofing her career meant walking away from the digital world. She is now a second-year bookbinding apprentice at Ludlow Bookbinders in Shropshire, learning a trade whose core techniques have not changed for centuries.

"Even just staring at a screen too long was bad for me," she said. "I always wanted to do something more material, I think something is inherently more valuable when it is made by a person."

The work at Ludlow is slow, detailed and tactile. The bookbinding process is almost entirely by hand, using Victorian-built presses, foil-blocking machines and glue brushes.

"People are discovering that, as everything is already decided for you by a computer or algorithm, being able to make or own something physically is good," Lawley said. "And it is very satisfying to repeat a task to perfection. It is meditative as a job so it is extremely low-cortisol."

Paul Kidson, Ludlow's chief executive and a fourth-generation bookbinder, said an influx of interest from young people represented a lifeline for a rapidly shrinking industry. He estimates there are fewer than 50 handcraft-operating bookbinders in Britain.

"British bookbinding has a terrific reputation across the world, but like so many things in the 50s, 60s and 70s, the training just started to dry up," Kidson said. "All the formal apprentice schemes collapsed in the early 1980s, and the industry got no training at all.

"We have to train our own people because you can't recruit at volume because there aren't any [courses]. Fortunately, there is a desire among people to have the satisfaction of actually making something."

There is no lack of commercial demand. High-end publishers are betting that shoppers will pay a premium for objects that are crafted by human hands.

Joanna Reynolds, the chief executive of the Folio Society book publisher – which partnered with Ludlow for a limited edition release of A Game of Thrones – said the company rejected generative AI tools in its creative processes.

"We do not use AI in terms of our art," she said. "We believe in the importance of supporting the creative world. Their skills and their abilities need to be supported by as many people as possible."

The number of young people hoping to fill these creative posts is growing rapidly. Cox London, a design house that specialises in artistic metalwork, started its apprenticeship scheme last year. Nicola Cox, a co-founder, said this year the company received more than 160 applications for two apprenticeship places.

◀ *Lucky Emerson and Nazifa Tabassum (above) are apprentices at Cox London, a design house that specialises in metalwork*
PHOTOGRAPHS: INGE CLEMENTE

◀ *An apprentice prop maker at the National Theatre, which has had record applications for its recent apprenticeship programme*
PHOTOGRAPH: CAMERON SLATER

"People want to make things and work with materials, [to] have that closeness with it," she said. "There is AI-proofness about art that is made with someone's hands."

For Lucky Emerson, an apprentice at Cox London, there is a "worrying feeling" that AI is taking over the creative world.

"The physicality of actually making things is incomparable, especially when people crave originality. Even though technology has advanced, handcrafted art is considered a lot more valuable and will always remain that way."

Nazifa Tabassum, also an apprentice at Cox London, said she did not think AI would replace her work, but that it could change it.

"For me, it isn't just about making things with my hands," she said. "It's about continuously developing my skills, and using technology where it adds value, while still providing the expertise and craftsmanship that people can't easily automate.

"I see AI as a tool that can assist, but not something that replaces, the satisfaction and value of skilled manual, handcrafted work."

At the National Theatre in London, technical apprenticeships span everything from IT to traditional wig-making, costume work, prop-making and metalwork.

"Our apprenticeships are partly about the need to create a more representative workforce, both for the National Theatre and for the [wider] creative sector," said Kath Geraghty, the head of technical qualifications.

"It is also about plugging the skill gap. These theatre crafts are dying out – our metalworkers are all over 50, wig-making as a skill is really dying. There's a real need to create our own talent.

"And it's about creating a skilled workforce for the wider creative sector beyond theatre, such as film, TV and broadcast."

Geraghty added that, like many employers, the National Theatre was struggling with the huge number of AI-generated applications for its apprenticeship programme.

"We used to think 100 applicants was a popular apprenticeship," she said. "In this most recent round of recruitment, we had 728 applications for one role.

"We haven't yet worked out how to manage it, because it's not viable for our staff to read 700 applications with care and attention. But the job market young people are in is difficult, and they are applying for anything they can."

Youth joblessness Figure drops below 1 million

The number of young people not in education, employment or training (Neet) in the UK fell below 1 million in the latest three-month period.

The Office for National Statistics said its surveys showed there were an estimated 981,000 Neets in April to June, compared with 1,012,000 in January to March.

On an annual basis, the number of Neets was 30,000 higher than a year ago, but the fall will give a lift to ministers concerned that, at 13%, the proportion of young people outside work, education and training remains among the highest in Europe.

The TUC general secretary, Paul Nowak, described the situation as "a crisis", adding: "The evidence is crystal clear – good quality employment support, more good training places and a strong growing economy with more vacancies is what we need."

Ben Harrison, the director of the Work Foundation at Lancaster University, cautioned that it would be "a mistake to assume" that the drop in Neets over the last quarter was a turning point.

"Although more young people are now looking for work than a year ago, they are doing so at a particularly difficult moment to take their first steps into the labour market," he said. "The number of 'starter' jobs accessible to people entering work for the first time has fallen by 49% over the last decade, leaving only one starter vacancy for every three Neets nationally."

Allen Simpson, the chief executive of UKHospitality, argued that the quickest and easiest way to stimulate the jobs market for young people was to "reduce the cost of employment".

Recent analysis has shown that employers are reluctant to hire young people, despite official figures showing the economy has expanded over the past year.

Some experts have blamed the use of artificial intelligence in some industries to perform tasks usually preserved for entry-level staff.

A report this week by the Work Foundation found that more than 36% of employers had reduced the number of entry-level jobs available to people aged 16-24 in the last 12 months.

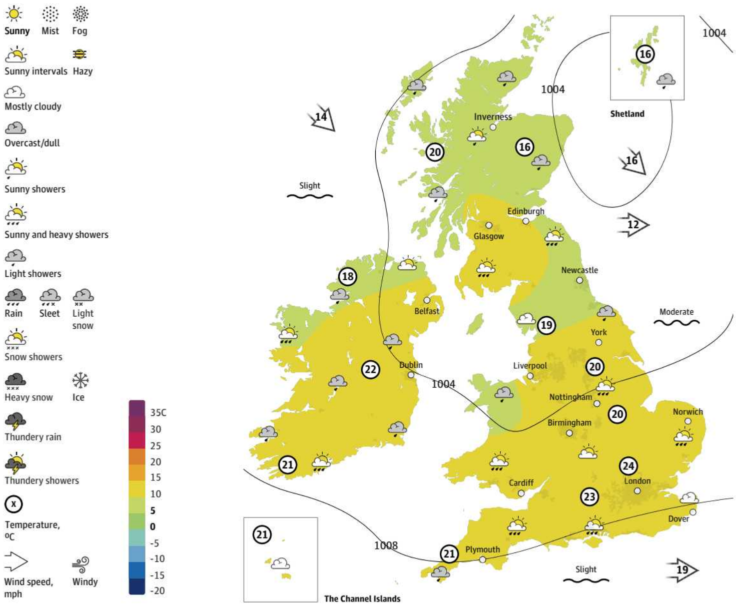
Work and pensions secretary Pat McFadden has described tackling youth unemployment as a "national cause".

The ONS said the annual rise of 30,000 was largely among young men, with an increase of 25,000 on the year. It said that, of the total number of young people who were Neet, 530,000 were men and 451,000 were women.

Phillip Inman

Weather
Friday 28 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today


Sunny
Mist
Fog
Sunny intervals
Hazy
Mostly cloudy
Overcast/dull
Sunny showers
Sunny and heavy showers
Light showers
Rain
Sleet
Light snow
Snow showers
Heavy snow
Ice
Thundery rain
Thundery showers
Temperature, ºC
Wind speed, mph
Windy
35C
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
-5
-10
-15
-20
1004
16
Shetland
1004
14
Inverness
20
16
16
Slight
Edinburgh
12
Glasgow
18
Newcastle
Belfast
Moderate
19
York
22
Dublin
Liverpool
20
1004
Nottingham
Birmingham
20
Norwich
21
Cardiff
24
London
23
Dover
21
1008
21
Plymouth
Slight
19
The Channel Islands

Forecast

Low 14 High 19
Tomorrow

Low 14 High 20
Sunday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

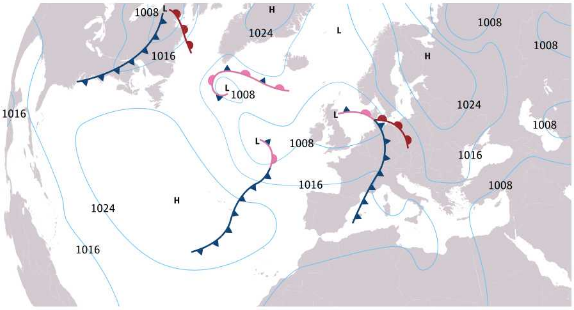
Latest	
25 Aug 2026	427.03
Weekly average	
16 Aug 2026	426.98
27 Aug 2025	425.60
27 Aug 2016	402.11
Pre-industrial base	280
Safe level	350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	16	24	55%	Low
Manchester	14	19	85%	Low
Edinburgh	13	20	85%	Low
Belfast	12	21	85%	Low
Birmingham	15	20	70%	Low
Brighton	15	21	60%	Low
Bristol	16	21	90%	Low
Cardiff	16	20	85%	Low
Newcastle	13	18	90%	Low
Penzance	17	20	90%	Low

Atlantic front


1008
L
H
1024
L
1016
L
1008
H
1008
1008
1016
L
1008
1024
1008
1016
1016
1024
H
1008
1016
1016

Cold front

Warm front

Occluded front

Trough

High tides

© Crown Copyright and/or database rights. Reproduced by permission of the Keeper of Public Records and the UK Hydrographic Office

Aberdeen	0110	4.2m	1342	4.1m
Avonmouth	0716	12.3m	1934	12.7m
Barrow	1134	8.6m	2343	9.1m
Belfast	1116	3.2m	2314	3.4m
Cobh	0528	3.8m	1744	4.0m
Cromer	0623	5.0m	1859	4.8m
Dover	1107	6.5m	2323	6.4m
Dublin	1141	3.8m	2339	4.1m
Galway	0520	4.7m	1728	5.0m
Greenock	0019	3.4m	1237	3.1m
Harwich	--	--	1155	3.8m
Holyhead	1028	5.2m	2236	5.6m
Hull	0608	7.3m	1843	7.1m
Leith	0230	5.3m	1456	5.3m
Liverpool	1116	8.9m	2325	9.4m
London Bridge	0151	6.7m	1408	6.8m
Lossiemouth	--	--	1214	3.9m
Milford Haven	0616	6.6m	1831	7.0m
Newquay	0507	6.5m	1721	6.9m
North Shields	0316	4.9m	1547	4.8m
Oban	0555	3.7m	1813	4.0m
Penzance	0440	5.2m	1655	5.5m
Plymouth	0549	5.1m	1801	5.3m
Portsmouth	1142	4.6m	2345	4.5m
Southport	1051	8.6m	2300	9.1m
Stornoway	0658	4.4m	1902	4.9m
Portland	0701	1.9m	1916	2.1m
Whitby	0351	5.4m	1620	5.3m
Wick	1135	3.2m	2336	3.5m
Workington	1138	7.8m	2349	8.3m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises	0606
Sun sets	1955
Moon rises	1956
Moon sets	0615
Full Moon	28 Aug

AccuWeather.com

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2027 to 0626
Birm'ham	2004 to 0613
Brighton	1955 to 0610
Bristol	2006 to 0619
Carlisle	2014 to 0612
Cork	2030 to 0641
Dublin	2024 to 0629
Glasgow	2022 to 0616
Harlech	2014 to 0622
Inverness	2025 to 0611
London	1955 to 0608
M'chester	2008 to 0613
Newcastle	2009 to 0607
Norwich	1953 to 0600
Penzance	2015 to 0632

Weatherwatch

St Bartholomew's Day was on 24 August, 40 days after St Swithin's Day. An old saying has it that "St Bartlemy's mantle wipes dry / All the tears that St Swithin can cry", at the end of a wet spell.

Bartholomew was a disciple, notable for being skinned during his martyrdom. His day heralded the coming of cooler weather: "At St Bartholomew / There comes cold dew." Like St Swithin, his day also supposedly signals the weather ahead: "If St Bartholomew's Day be fair and clear / Then a prosperous autumn comes that year."

This day was the occasion for great harvest fairs and celebrations, so that any riotous, chaotic scene was described as "like Bartholomew Fair". Some of these may predate the saint's arrival in England, with pagan rites surviving in disguised form. In West Witton, North Yorkshire, the day is marked by the Burning of the Bartle. An effigy, supposedly representing a sheep stealer called Old Bartle, is paraded through the village before being burned. This looks like a rite to mark the change of seasons.

Thankfully though, actual human sacrifice is no longer demanded on St Bartholomew's Day to ensure good weather.

David Hambling

Around the world

Algiers	31	Lisbon	25
Ams'dam	21	Madrid	26
Athens	33	Malaga	31
Auckland	17	Melb'rne	16
B Aires	16	Mexico C	25
Bangkok	32	Miami	33
Barcelona	30	Milan	31
Basra	49	Mombasa	30
Beijing	22	Moscow	19
Berlin	27	Mumbai	31
Bermuda	31	N Orleans	31
Brussels	21	Nairobi	26
Budapest	31	New Delhi	35
C'hagen	20	New York	27
Cairo	36	Oslo	20
Cape Town	22	Paris	22
Chicago	27	Perth	19
Corfu	38	Prague	29
Dakar	32	Reykjavik	11
Dhaka	32	Rio de J	26
Dublin	22	Rome	35
Florence	37	Shanghai	32
Gibraltar	28	Singapore	32
H Kong	32	Stockh'm	20
Harare	23	Strasb'g	25
Helsinki	20	Sydney	19
Istanbul	26	Tel Aviv	32
Jo'burg	21	Tenerife	29
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	31
K'mandu	29	Toronto	23
Kabul	33	Vancouv'r	21
Kingston	33	Vienna	32
Kolkata	32	Warsaw	26
L Angeles	35	Wash'ton	28
Lagos	28	Well'ton	15
Lima	25	Zurich	23

Football

Summer tour leaves Spurs off the pace

Page 40 →

Cycling

Pogacar wobbles but recovers for Vuelta stage win

Page 37 →

Sport

▲ *Cambridge's Gassan Ahadme stretches to control the ball during a Carabao Cup defeat by Millwall*
MI NEWS/NUR PHOTO/ SUTTERSTOCK

Nostalgia kick-off

Do I still love going to the football or just reliving a childhood spent in the stands?

Max Rushden

tradingref.com

On 11 February 1989, Cambridge United beat Hartlepool 6-0. My memories of the game are faint. The internet can't even tell me who scored - perhaps Laurie Ryan got a couple. I do recall walking past some Hartlepool fans on Coldham's Common who were peering into a brook. "Looking for a new centre forward?" Not a terrible joke from my dad. There was polite laughter at least.

I also remember it was my friend Clive's first game. How can you possibly start with a 6-0? It will never be that good again. My debut was coming back from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 with Exeter three or four years earlier. That feels about right. Here's your team, as Gennaro Gattuso would say, sometimes maybe good, sometimes maybe shit.

We sat in the Junior U's enclosure (not enclosed) in block A and probably talked about Panini stickers and which division we'd end up playing in when we were older. We weren't shooting for the stars - a solid Division Three career beckoned.

On Tuesday, 37 years after the Hartlepool demotion, Clive and I are in the main stand watching the U's take on Millwall in the Carabao Cup second round - zero professional appearances between us.

When you're 10, a lot of the game passes you by. The game is happening, but there's cigarettes and swearing and big men shouting. I don't really remember going to the Abbey being a choice. This was just what I did every other week for the best part of a decade. I'm not sure I ever questioned it.

On Tuesday, again a lot of the game passed us by, it wasn't a classic. Millwall legend, and enormous man, Jake Cooper scored early and despite some decent football we never really got close to breaking them down. The Littlewoods/Milk/Rumbelows/Carling/Carabao dream over for yet another year.

There was far less talk of football stickers and who was better at shooting; more parenting, mortgages, family and a new terrifying hot topic: retirement. Life was more straightforward when you were 10.

While there are many fans who went week in week out as children, and still do as adults, for many, perhaps most of us, geography and life mean a trip is rare to this place where a piece of your heart resides.

Near the ground I am moved by the nostalgia and familiarity. I can't work out whether it's as wonderful as I think it is or whether I just want it to feel like that because if you're lucky enough to have had a wonderful childhood it's nice to remember it.

Perhaps it's more pertinent because I live 10,000 miles away. Or maybe I'm just at the start of a mid-life crisis or I can get a column out of it.

U's fans sing: "Walking down Newmarket Road to see the Cambridge aces". And there is the "This is home" moment when the floodlights come into view. It was three nights ago, but I can't remember whether they were on. In my mind they were. These misty beacons shining above the sky.

I'm lucky we still play in the same ground that, despite a few little upgrades, looks identical to how it did in the 90s. The same bricks, the same yellow wooden doors, the same rickety turnstiles.

It's odd to look at the north terrace and think about the hours I spent in there feeling as if I was part of a Galatasaray-style set of ultras. It's a stand that doesn't even take up the width of the pitch. Possibly the least intimidating set of supporters going.

Then we're into classic lower-league football, just people sitting there yelling stuff. Pelly Ruddock Mpanzu passes the ball backwards: "GET IT FORWARD." A winger plays it back to the full-back to make a better angle for the cross: "JUST GET IT IN THERE." The referee gives a justifiable decision to Millwall: the rage swearing begins in force. It's all good stuff. But a lot of the game is categorically not interesting. OK, it's a slightly meaningless game, even if Alex Neil has turned bright red from shouting for 90 minutes. But I berate myself for getting bored. Clive and I don't even want penalties. We want a pint at the Devonshire Arms.

> *I'm lucky we still play in the same ground that, despite a few little upgrades, looks identical to how it did in the 90s*

After all these years, do I still love going to football, do I love Cambridge United? Or do I just love the idea of it? Have I simply become a TV supporter?

One-nil down and the board goes up showing six added minutes. SIX. But then we push for an equaliser. We all stand up and lean to our left to see past the metal post that has blocked our view of the goal at the Newmarket Road end for the previous hour and a half.

We don't really fashion that one chance. Then it's full time. We're having a pint as two teenagers run past, followed by a big gang of young Cambridge fans - all about 5ft, voices not yet broken. "Are you Millwall?" "No, Cambridge." "Where do you live?" "Bishop's Stortford." "Ah, don't worry." The Cambridge firm again, every bit as unthreatening as in the 90s.

It's reassuring that the thing that used to be such a regular part of my life just keeps on keeping on: different seven-year-olds in the main stand, different 18-year-olds in the north terrace, and even if you can only pop back very intermittently it still feels almost the same.

‘Players are seriously hurt, but they’re going to show up’

Journeyman pro McDonald explains the sacrifices being made on the circuit to ensure a pay cheque

Matt Hughes

For Mackenzie McDonald the players’ push for greater prize money and welfare contributions from the grand slam tournaments could result in the difference between putting food on the table and making a decent living.

After 10 years on the ATP Tour the 31-year-old American is not pleading poverty, but knows that life on the professional circuit can be a hand-to-mouth existence, with players’ physical and mental welfare often compromised due to their desperation to get back on court.

McDonald keeps returning to the point that many of his peers at the US Open will be playing despite carrying serious injuries because of their need for a pay cheque.

With first-round losers in the men’s and women’s singles receiving a record $140,000 (£103,000) many will not blame them, although in a sport with a more coherent financial structure and generous welfare provision such sacrifices might not be necessary.

Despite combined annual revenues of more than $2bn the four grand slams do not provide a formal contribution to player welfare or pensions, although the US Tennis Association (USTA) made a significant step last week by committing $2m to a new player support programme.

“I know a good handful of players right now that are seriously hurt,” McDonald says. “But I know they’re going to show up to the US Open and get on court to make sure they can make some money because they’ve got bills to pay. They want to get an apartment and they want to pay their team – a coach, physio, trainer.

“The grand slams are the engine that enables them to make a living and they have to capitalise on that. It’s the difference between putting food on the table and making a living. That’s what’s at stake for some people.”

Much of the lobbying for the slams to increase their prize pots to 22% of revenues, from about 15%, has come from global stars such as Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka due to their public profile, but McDonald provides a more compelling case than the gripes of multimillionaires.

With total earnings of more than $7m he is unlikely to be on the bread line at present, but has been at various points in his career. Seemingly high income levels ignore the fact that players are responsible for their travel and coaching costs, plus those of their often large entourages.

“Things have shifted, but at the lower level the money has always been pretty insignificant,” McDonald says. “I’d say if you’re ranked 250 in the world right now you’re making about $200,000. I know for a fact that only 88 players last year made a million dollars. But that’s before taxes and all your costs, which are very significant.

“Many players go straight from college, where everything is paid for, into professional tennis where you’re booking your own flights and often paying for premium flights at the end of the week.

“I became a master of travel cheat codes, but you also have to pay for your performance team, whether that’s a strength and conditioning coach, a physio, psychologist or your main coach. Plus their travel.

“As players, we’re an undervalued asset for how much screen time we provide for broadcasters and how much betting income we generate for gambling operators.”

McDonald is fit to play at Flushing Meadows if he comes through qualifying, but has also experienced the darker side of a sport with comprehensive medical insurance limited to the world’s top 150 players, although the next 100 are given a more basic package by the ATP.

After breaking into the world’s top 60 for the first time in 2019 he missed most of the season after sustaining a serious hamstring injury at the French Open. His comeback was derailed by the Covid-19 pandemic the following year.

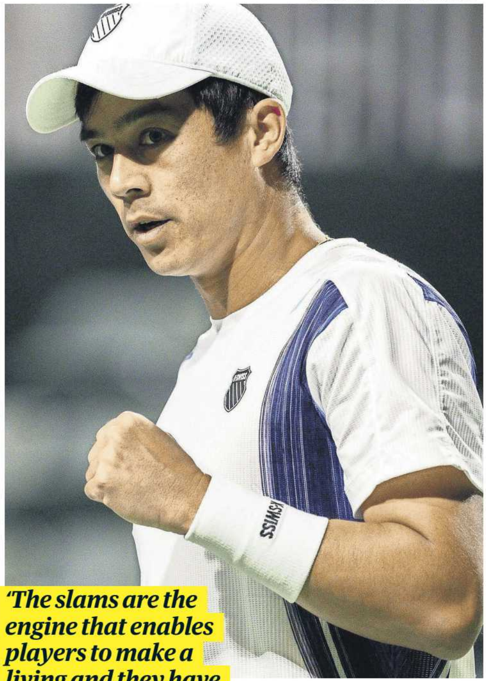
“The tough part about tennis is that when you get hurt you’re not making any money and your world ranking also goes down, which limits your ability to compete in the future,” McDonald says. “You can’t just get back on the wheel.

“Being able to adapt to how you’re doing is a skill in itself. You could have a really good year and make say seven figures, but then you get injured and you’re not earning anything.”

The USTA’s commitment to creating a player support programme as part of this year’s $108m prize fund is a significant development, but the long-running dispute has not been resolved.

In addition to wanting a similar undertaking from the other slams, the players’ representatives are demanding a fixed revenue-share scheme be implemented.

“I hope in the future that the money-making engines of tennis would help to contribute to player welfare,” McDonald says. “It’s going in that direction, but how fast it happens is a different question.”



▼ *Mackenzie McDonald says players are undervalued*
MAURICIO PAIZ/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

‘The slams are the engine that enables players to make a living and they have to capitalise on that’

Alcaraz makes US Open return against Safiullin

Tumaini Carayol
New York

Carlos Alcaraz has been handed a tough draw on his return to singles competition after a four-month injury layoff as he faces the in-form Russian Roman Safiullin in the first round of the US Open.

Alcaraz, the defending champion in New York, has not competed in singles since sustaining a right wrist injury at the Barcelona Open in April, with the Spaniard missing the French Open and Wimbledon. He was understandably rusty and tentative with his first serve when making his first competitive appearance since the injury alongside Serena Williams in the mixed doubles event on Tuesday, with the pair losing in the quarter-finals. His opening match against the world No 98 Safiullin, who has risen more than 100 places in the world rankings this year after returning from injury and defeated Alcaraz indoors at the Paris Masters in 2023, will be a significant challenge.

Between the uncertainty surrounding Alcaraz and the absence of the world No 1, Jannik Sinner, who was forced to withdraw due to a knee injury, the men’s Flushing Meadows draw is as open as it has been in years. The four-time champion Novak Djokovic is the fourth seed and in Alcaraz’s half of the draw. He faces Mariano Navone in the first round. Alexander Zverev, the French Open champion, is the top seed at a grand slam tournament for the first time and faces the Italian Lorenzo Sonego in his opener.

In the women’s draw Aryna Sabalenka, the defending champion, will begin against Camila Osorio as she tries to hold on to her No 1 ranking after a difficult few months.

The highest ranked players in Sabalenka’s half are the in-form third seed, Jessica Pegula, the Wimbledon champion and sixth seed, Linda Noskova, and the seventh seed, Karolina Muchova, the runner-up at Wimbledon. The strong bottom half of the draw, meanwhile, is overflowing with title contenders in Elena Rybakina, Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff and Mirra Andreeva.

Rugby union

Residents push back against Twickenham concert plan

Gerard Meagher

The Rugby Football Union’s bid to stage more concerts at Twickenham has been delivered a blow after local councillors insisted planning permission should not be awarded until the proposal further commits to limiting the impact.

The RFU has submitted its planning application to Richmond council to use the stadium for non-sporting events for up to 15 days a year, with a decision due in October. Public consultation was due to end yesterday with 240 submissions in favour and 456 against at the time of writing.

While the ward councillors based in neighbouring Whitton, St Margarets and North Twickenham do not oppose the idea of the stadium hosting more concerts, they make clear in comments on the application they believe the plan does not do enough to guarantee improvements in infrastructure to cope with the “intensification of use” or mitigate against the effect on local residents.

The councillors, who do not sit on the planning committee that will make the decision, highlight transport, road closures and the cumulative effect of more concerts in addition to the sporting events held at Twickenham. They suggest the RFU should fully fund “additional public realm impacts”.

The letter, signed by councillors Katie Mansfield, Maria Margiotta and Jo Humphreys, says: “We do not believe that the application yet provides sufficient assurance that this intensification of use will be matched by the infrastructure and mitigation necessary to accommodate it, or that all necessary measures will be sufficiently specific, funded and enforceable.”

▲ *Twickenham is allowed to hold three non-sporting events per year*

The RFU can host three non-sporting events per year, but has applied for a phased increase to eight, spread over 15 event days, and to increase the maximum capacity from 55,000 to 75,000.

The union points out it is a phased increase, with six non-sporting event days in year one and only one in midweek initially.

The union believes the additional revenue would be crucial in helping to fund the planned £660m overhaul of Twickenham and has previously threatened to relocate if Richmond council does not grant the necessary permission. The RFU has also said hosting more concerts would underpin a £500m investment into rugby over the next five years.

Cricket *County Championship*

Carse makes fast start for Durham after England drama

Tanya Aldred
Scarborough

◀ *Brydon Carse (left) celebrates with Ben Stokes after dismissing Gloucestershire's Joe Phillips*
MIKE EGERTON/PA

Durham's Brydon Carse, last pictured in handcuffs outside a Derby nightclub and subsequently dropped from England's Test squad, took his emotions out on **Gloucestershire** early. He truncheoned Joe Phillips's middle stump with his sixth ball and induced Miles Hammond into a flamboyant drive a couple of overs later.

With Matthew Potts snaffling Cameron Bancroft, Gloucestershire were on the precipice at 13 for three. A classy 60 from James Bracey enabled them to limp to 137, but Kasey Aldridge mopped up most of the rest with five for 16. Durham then lost two quick wickets, until an unbeaten half-century from David Bedingham sailed them to calmer waters.

It was another dud day for **Surrey**. After losing the toss and being asked to bat, they were soon in trouble on a verdant Chelmsford wicket. Sam Cook, who swapped into the **Essex** side after being released by England, picked up three wickets alongside Zaman Akhter, as Surrey were dismissed for 183. Adam Thomas top scored with 43, but there were few consolation runs for Ollie Pope, also surplus to requirements at Lord's. There was just time for Essex's Paul Walter to be caught behind before bad light stopped play.

Honours were fairly even at North Marine Road where the rain blew in mid-afternoon. **Leicestershire**'s Josh Davey plucked out both **Yorkshire** openers cheaply, but Sam Whiteman and James Wharton, unbeaten on 70, restocked the shelves. Jonny Bairstow was caught behind for one.

Zak Crawley's highest score of the season gave **Kent** a boost on a long day waiting for the rain to stop at Wantage Road. His unbeaten 82 dominated an unbroken opening stand of 154 with Ben Compton in the promotion nose to nose against **Northamptonshire**.

Sonny Baker ripped up **Glamorgan**'s rebuilding plans, with two wickets in his first over after being subbed into the **Hampshire** side. It was a damp day designed for bowlers - 17 wickets fell, including Glamorgan's top three all for ducks. **Sussex**'s Henry Crocombe grabbed a hat-trick at Hove as **Somerset** lost their last five wickets for 11 runs.

Cycling *Vuelta a España*

Pogacar recovers from corner skid to win stage six

Tadej Pogacar outsprinted Enric Mas to claim victory in stage six of the Vuelta a España, his third stage win of the race. The Slovenian and Mas outshone their rivals on the gravel in the stage's final climb, and Pogacar held off the Spaniard when arriving in Castellón de la Plana to extend his general classification lead. The five-time Tour de France winner Pogacar, the overwhelming favourite for the Vuelta, is aiming to complete a Grand Tour grand slam.

Ramses Debruyne grabbed third spot on the podium, finishing in a group including Primoz Roglic, Richard Carapaz and Felix Gall, 46 seconds behind the leaders. UAE Team Emirates' Pogacar, who had a brief scare as he came off the road on the final descent, now leads Movistar's Mas by 3min 34sec and his compatriot Roglic by 4min 21sec overall.

It took a long time for an escape to form before 15 riders established a two-and-a-half minute gap on the peloton with 40km remaining. The final climb of Puerto El Bartolo split up the break and then peeled on to a gravel road, where Pogacar attacked. Mas was hot on his tail and dug deep to charge past Pogacar and come over the top of the climb ahead. Pogacar came off the road and into a grassy section after misjudging a corner, but recovered to get back on Mas's trail. The pair worked well together to keep their advantage. Pogacar led out towards the finish line and Mas could not catch him.

The Netcompany Ineos rider Josh Tarling abandoned the race with around 120km of the stage left. The Briton's brother Finlay Tarling died in the Tour of Portugal after a crash with a vehicle, but Josh decided to race in Spain in honour of his sibling. "Josh Tarling's brave La Vuelta has come to an end and he's decided to stop. We couldn't be prouder," said Netcompany Ineos on social media. **AFP**

Tadej Pogacar is closing in on his first Vuelta title

Results and cricket scoreboard

Football

CARABAO EFL CUP
Second round

Chelsea (0) **2** Welbeck 50, Odoffin 79og	**Luton** (0) **0**
Fulham (2) **3** Smith Rowe 37, Muniz 42, Garcia 90+3	**AFC Wimbledon** (0) **0**

EUROPA LEAGUE
Playoff round: Second leg AGF 1 v Benfica 3 (agg 2-6); Anderlecht 3 Kairat 0 (6-0); Ararat-Armenia 1 Uni Craiova 0 (2-1); CSKA Sofia 0 OFI 2 (0-5); Kauno Zalgiris 1 Besiktas 0 (1-3); Ferencvaros 4 Trabzonspor 0 (5-0); Iberia 1999 1 Jagiellonia Bialystock 2 (1-6); Lillestrøm 2 Egnatia 1 (aet; 2-1); Omonia Nicosia 4 Sint-Truiden 2 (4-3); Plzen 5 Red Star Belgrade 1 (aet; 5-4); RB Salzburg 3 Mjällby 0 (4-0); Thun 2 Lech Poznan 2 (2-9)

CONFERENCE LEAGUE
Playoff round: Second leg

Brighton (3) **4** Kostoulas 22, De Cuyper 33, Wieffer 38, Boscagli 86	**Tromsø** (0) **0** (agg 4-0)
Freiburg (1) **4** Scherhant 6, Matanovic 60, Irié 63, Goto 85	**Motherwell** (1) **1** Longelo 22 30,841 (agg 7-2)
Hibernian (0) **2** Kerr 56, Passlack 77	**Gent** (1) **3** Vergara 39, Burgess 84, Chaiwa 90+1og (agg 2-3)
Jablonec (0) **1** Tchanturishvili 73 (aet; agg 1-1; Jablonec won 4-3 on pens)	**Rangers** (0) **0** 5,563
KuPS (0) **1** Burke 75og	**Shamrock Rovers** (0) **0** 2,768 (agg 2-1)
Larne (0) **0** (agg 2-2; score at 90 mins)	**Lincoln Red Imps** (0) **2** Gómez 82, Toledano 84

Ajax 5 Sion 3 (agg 9-5); Austria Vienna 0 Braga 0 (0-2); Borac 3 Víkingur 1 (6-2); Brann 3 Paok 2 (4-3); Copenhagen 4 Inter Turku 1 (4-1); Hapoel Tel-Aviv 0 Atalanta 1 (0-1); Hradec Kralove 1 Panathinaikos 2 (aet; 3-4); Inter D'Escaldes 0 Drita 0 (aet; 2-2; Inter D'Escaldes won 4-2 on pens); Maccabi Tel-Aviv 1 Lugano 1 (2-3); Monaco 4 Gornik Zabrze 1 (7-3); Pafos 4 Dinamo City 2 (aet; 5-3); Partizan Belgrade L Getafe L; Qarabag 1 Twente 4 (aet; 2-4); Rakow Czestochowa 2 Hajduk Split 3 (aet; 4-5); Riga 2 KÍ 1 (2-x); Rijeka 1 Midtjylland 4 (1-6); St Gallen 2 Nordsjælland 3 (2-4)

ENTERPRISE NATIONAL LEAGUE
Boreham Wood 2 Boston Utd 1

LA LIGA
Celta Vigo 1 Osasuna 3; Barcelona L Athletic Bilbao L

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE
Wigan 46 Hull KR 0

BETFRED CHAMPIONSHIP
Sheffield 12 Widnes 8

Cricket

SECOND MEN'S TEST
Colombo India 503-9 dec (DB Padikkal 117, DC Jurel 105no, RR Pant 63, S Gill 50; AM Fernando 4-106). Sri Lanka 290 (GS Dinusha 103, DPS Sooriyabandara 80) & 429-9 dec (GS Dinusha 133no, DPS Sooriyabandara 92, PHK Mendis 55). Match drawn. India won two match series 1-0.

ROTHESAY COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP
Division One (first day of four)

Essex v Surrey

Chelmsford Essex (3pts) trail Surrey (0) by 173 runs with nine first-innings wickets remaining.

Surrey First innings

***RJ Burns** lbw b Porter	6
DP Sibley c Pepper b Cook	21
JW Blake c Harmer b Snater	14
ARG Thomas c Critchley b Cook	43
†BT Foakes lbw b Snater	0
MK Lomror run out	17
OJD Pope lbw b Akhter	13
TE Lawes c Pepper b Akhter	38
MD Fisher c Westley b Akhter	4
RD Chahar c Westley b Cook	9
DJ Worrall not out	12
Extras (b4, lb2)	6
Total (53 overs)	**183**

Fall 16, 41, 41, 50, 102, 108, 138, 146, 161.
Bowling Porter 14-5-56-1; Snater 9-2-31-2; Bennett 3-1-5-0; Akhter 10-3-36-3; Cook 15-5-41-3; Harmer-2-1-8-0.

Essex First innings

D Elgar not out	2
PI Walter c Foakes b Worrall	4
***T Westley** not out	0
Extras (lb4)	4
Total (for 1, 4 overs)	**10**

Fall 9. **To bat** CWJ Allison, MJJ Critchley, †MS Pepper, SR Harmer, S Snater, JA Porter, Z Akhter, SJ Cook, C Bennett.
Bowling Worrall 2-1-1-1; Fisher 2-0-5-0.
Toss Essex elected to field
Umpires M Burns and NJ Llong.

Glamorgan v Hampshire

Sophia Gardens Glamorgan (3pts) trail Hampshire (0) by 51 runs with three first-innings wickets remaining.

Hampshire First innings

AGH Orr lbw b Ul-Hassan	36
NRT Gubbins c Carlson b Van der Gugten	1
TE Albert b Ul-Hassan	10
JS Lehmann not out	51
TJ Prest b Douthwaite	0
***†BC Brown** b Hamza	9
AJ Neal c Tribe b Hamza	9
SW Currie b Van der Gugten	0
JK Fuller c Tribe b Ul-Hassan	4
KJ Abbott c Cooke b Douthwaite	16
EV Jack b Hamza	7
Extras (b4, lb1, nb14)	19
Total (40 overs)	**162**

Fall 9, 38, 77, 78, 107, 123, 124, 129, 150.
Bowling Van der Gugten 13-3-36-2; Hamza 10-2-39-3; Ul-Hassan 11-1-33-3; Douthwaite 6-0-49-2.

Glamorgan First innings

Z Ul-Hassan lbw b Abbott	0
AM Tribe c Lehmann b Jack	0
***KS Carlson** c Lehmann b Jack	0
BI Kellaway c Brown b Baker	57
CA Ingram lbw b Abbott	32
SR Dickson b Abbott	1
†CB Cooke b Baker	8
DA Douthwaite not out	8
MS Crane not out	0
Extras (lb3, nb2)	5
Total (for 7, 38 overs)	**111**

Fall 0, 0, 2, 67, 77, 102, 103.
To bat T Van der Gugten, M Hamza.
Bowling Abbott 11-4-23-3; Jack 7-2-25-2; Fuller 9-1-36-0; Currie 8-2-21-0; Baker 3-0-3-2.
Toss Glamorgan elected to field.
Umpires JD Middlebrook and S Shanmugam.

Sussex v Somerset

Hove Sussex (3pts) trail Somerset (0) by 125 runs with eight first-innings wickets remaining.

Somerset First innings

JF Thomas c Simpson b Crocombe	26
TA Lammonby c Unadkat b Hunt	1
AM Vaughan c Unadkat b Hunt	20
HM Nicholls b Crocombe	0
TB Abell c Tear b Clark	72
†JEK Rew c Simpson b Hunt	12
C Overton c Simpson b Crocombe	54
***L Gregory** c & b Clark	0
J Shaw not out	7
M Pretorius c Haines b Crocombe	0
MJ Leach c Simpson b Crocombe	0
Extras (lb6, nb4)	10
Total (58 overs)	**202**

Fall 6, 48, 48, 59, 96, 191, 191, 202, 202.
Bowling Unadkat 13-2-45-0; Hunt 16-5-31-3; Crocombe 14-2-56-5; Evison 5-0-22-0; Carson 2-0-11-0; Coles 3-0-18-0; Clark 5-0-13-2.

Sussex First innings

DP Hughes lbw b Pretorius	11
***TJ Haines** c Lammonby b Gregory	8
TGR Clark not out	45
CJ Tear not out	10
Extras (b1, lb2)	3
Total (for 2, 17 overs)	**77**

Fall 15, 57.
To bat JM Coles, †JA Simpson, JDM Evison, JJ Carson, HT Crocombe, SF Hunt, JD Unadkat.
Bowling Gregory 7-3-19-1; Shaw 4-2-18-0; Overton 4-0-26-0; Pretorius 2-0-11-1.
Toss Sussex elected to field.
Umpires JD Shantry and T Lungley.

Yorkshire v Leicestershire

Scarborough Yorkshire (0pts) lead Leicestershire (0) by 144 runs with five first-innings wickets remaining.

Yorkshire First innings

A Lyth c Tattersall b Davey	4
WA Luxton b Davey	2
SM Whiteman c Tattersall b Scriven	49
JH Wharton not out	70
ML Revis c Tattersall b Green	14
***†JM Bairstow** c Tattersall b Hull	1
GCH Hill not out	0
Extras (lb4)	4
Total (for 5, 52 overs)	**144**

Fall 5, 6, 121, 140, 144.
To bat DM Bess, BO Coad, BM Cliff, CJ White.
Bowling Holland 13-5-24-0; Davey 10-1-22-2; Hull 5-0-24-1; Scriven 13-0-43-1; Green 10-1-26-1; Ahmed 1-0-1-0.
Leicestershire RK Patel, SSE Gumbs, R Ahmed, H Shaikh, NF Kelly, †JA Tattersall, *IG Holland, JH Davey, TAR Scriven, JO Hull, AM Green.
Toss Leicestershire elected to field.
Umpires GD Lloyd and ID Blackwell.

Edgbaston Warwickshire v Nottinghamshire, no play (rain).

Division Two (first day of four)

Durham v Gloucestershire

Banks Home Riverside Durham (3pts) trail Gloucestershire (0) by 37 runs with seven first-innings wickets remaining.

Gloucestershire First innings

***CT Bancroft** c Bedingham b Potts	1
JP Phillips b Carse	2
OJ Price c Ackermann b Aldridge	27
MAH Hammond b Carse	1
†JR Bracey lbw b Aldridge	60
TW Boorman c Robinson b Aldridge	0
DJ Ahmed c Aldridge b Potts	17
MJ Killeen c Robinson b Aldridge	6
RS Kishore b Stokes	0
JPH Hayes not out	0
JT Langridge c McKinney b Aldridge	4
Extras (b8, lb9, nb2)	19
Total (42 overs)	**137**

Fall 4, 12, 13, 79, 81, 109, 128, 129, 133.
Bowling Potts-12-1-27-2; Carse-12-0-51-2; Stokes-9-3-18-1; Rhodes-4-1-8-0; Aldridge-5-0-16-5.

Durham First innings

***AZ Lees** c Bracey b Langridge	6
BS McKinney c Phillips b Ahmed	8
WMH Rhodes c Price b Langridge	22
DG Bedingham not out	59
BA Stokes not out	0
Extras (b4, lb1)	5
Total (for 3, 26 overs)	**100**

Fall 12, 16, 100.
To bat G Clark, CN Ackermann, †OG Robinson, KL Aldridge, BA Carse, MJ Potts.
Bowling Langridge 8-2-28-2; Ahmed 7-1-32-1; Hayes 6-0-17-0; Killeen 4-1-18-0; Kishore 1-1-0-0.
Toss Durham elected to field.
Umpires JC Tredwell and SJ O'Shaughnessy.

Northamptonshire v Kent

Northampton Kent (0pts) lead Northamptonshire (0) by 154 runs with all first-innings wickets remaining.

Kent First innings

BG Compton not out	51
Z Crawley not out	82
Extras (b1, lb9, nb10, w1)	21
Total (36 overs)	**154**

To bat SA Northeast, TS Muyeye, *DJ Bell-Drummond, †CG Benjamin, G Stewart, E Singh, KJ Dudgeon, ME Milnes, MW Parkinson.
Bowling Sanderson 10-2-38-0; Guthrie 6-1-29-0; Procter 3-0-17-0; Chahal 8-0-30-0; Sales 6-2-23-0; Harrison 3-0-7-0.
Northamptonshire RS Vasconcelos, *LA Proctor, CG Harrison, NA McSweeney, SA Zaib, JJG Sales, GA Bartlett, †LD McManus, LCJ Guthrie, BW Sanderson, YS Chalal.
Toss Northamptonshire elected to field.
Umpires Hassan Adnan and PR Pollard.

Derby Derbyshire v Middlesex, no play (rain).
New Road Worcestershire v Lancashire, no play (rain).

Greg Wood's racing tips

Ffos Las **2.00** Little Jaybee **2.35** Cypriot Diaspora **3.10** Sydney Rock **3.45** Launceston **4.20** Grindleton **4.55** Robusto

Thirsk **2.13** Misemerald **2.48** Wootz **3.25** Baarberini **4.00** Kats Bob (nb) **4.38** Mirsky **5.13** Pinatique

Sandown **2.25** Rotelle **3.00** Hint Of Humour **3.35** Cilician **4.10** Glen Nevis (nap) **4.45** Box Clever **5.20** Sovereign View

Fontwell **4.05** Kom Tu Voudras **4.40** Salkadan **5.15** Kotari **5.50** Of Corse I Can **6.25** Camshaft **7.00** A Little Something **7.33** Double Power

Sedgefield **4.25** Datstheholyallofit **5.00** Littletown Lad **5.32** Tom Creen **6.05** Machete Beach **6.40** Jeteye **7.15** William Yeats **7.50** Megatothemax

Goodwood **4.35** Motown Filly **5.10** Brighton Beach **5.45** Ammoony **6.20** Ruby's Profit **6.55** Veil Of Clouds **7.28** Kimeko Glory

Golf

WOMEN'S IRISH OPEN (K Club, Ireland)
Leading first-round scores C Alexander (SA) 63; LM Humphreys (Eng) 67; J Melichova (Cz) 67; A Dawson (IoM) 67; A Fanali (It) 67; S Kouskova (Cz) 68; L Rydqvist (Swe) 68; A Fuller (Eng) 68; A Donegan (Ire) 69; K Arwefjaell (Swe) 69; P Urs (Ind) 69; B Navarrosa (US) 69; D Forbrigd (Nor) 70; G Clews (Eng) 70; A Foersterling (Ger) 70; M Folke (Swe) 70; M Hinson-Tolchard (Aus) 70; L Harm (Ger) 70; C Viden (Swe) 70

Tennis

US OPEN (Flushing Meadows, New York)
Mixed doubles: Final: K Muchova & J Mensik (Cz) bt B Bencic (Swi) & F Cobolli (It) 6-3 1-6 10-6

WTA ABIERTO MONTERREY (Mexico)
Second round: E Mertens (Bel) bt P Udvardy (Hun) 6-1 4-6 6-3; **A Parks** (US) bt M Chwalinska (Pol) 3-6 6-2 6-2; **C Tauson** (Den) bt E Alexandrova (Rus) 7-6 (6) 4-6 6-3; **D Vondrousova** (Cz) bt C Bucsa (Sp) 6-4 7-5.

Cycling

VUELTA A ESPAÑA (Spain)
Stage six (Alcosssebre - Castellón de la Plana, 177.4km) **1** T Pogacar (Svn) UAE Team Emirates-XRG 4hr 12min 40sec; **2** E Mas (Sp) Movistar same time; **3** R Debruyne (Bel) Alpecin-Premier Tech +46; **4** R Carapaz (Ecu) EF Education-EasyPost +46; **5** H Tejada (Col) XDS Astana +46

Overall standings: 1 T Pogacar 15hr 38min 27sec; **2** E Mas +3:34; **3** P Roglic (Svn) Red Bull-BORA-hansgrohe +4:21; **4** R Carapaz +4:50; **5** F Gall (Aut) Decathlon CMA CGM +4:55; **6** S Kuss (US) Visma-Lease a Bike +5:36; **7** O Onley (GB) Netcompany Ineos +5:37

Snooker

WST WUHAN OPEN (China)
Quarter finals: Chang B (Chn) bt J Trump (Eng) 5-1; **R O'Sullivan** (Eng) bt M Selby (Eng) 5-3; **Zhao X** (Chn) bt N Robertson (Aus) 5-1; **Xiao G** (Chn) bt M Williams (Wal) 5-3

Fixtures

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Premier League
Crystal Palace v Manchester City (8pm)
Sky Bet Championship
Wrexham v Birmingham (8pm)
Enterprise National League
Aldershot v Harrogate Town; Altrincham v Halifax; Barrow v Yeovil; Fylde v Forest Green; Gateshead v Sutton; Hartlepool v Eastleigh; Hornchurch v Woking; Scunthorpe v Solihull Moors; Southend v Kidderminster; Tamworth v Worthing; Wealdstone v Carlisle
William Hill Scottish Championship
Dunfermline v Raith (7.30pm)
William Hill Scottish League Two
Edinburgh City v Forfar
Sports Direct Premiership
Portadown v Coleraine
Novira Cymru Premier
Barry Town Utd v Airbus UK; Cardiff Met v Briton Ferry; Connah's Quay v Cambrian Utd; Holywell Town v Caernarfon Town; Llandudno v Haverfordwest County; Penybont v Flint Town Utd; The New Saints v Colwyn Bay; Trefelin v Ammanford

Cricket (11am unless stated)
First Women's One-Day International
Scotland v Netherlands, Glasgow
Rugby league (8pm unless stated)
BetFred Super League
Castleford v Catalans Dragons; Huddersfield v Leigh; St Helens v Leeds
BetFred Women's Super League
St Helens v York (5.15pm)

◀ *Jordan Cox came to the rescue with 55 off 105 balls for England at Lord's*
TOM JENKINS/ THE GUARDIAN

Day one scoreboard

Lord's England lead Pakistan by 248 runs with one first-innings wicket remaining.

England first innings		Balls	4s	6s
BM Duckett lbw b Mohd Abbas	**17**	20	3	0
EN Gay c Mohd Rizwwan b Mohd Abbas	**8**	17	2	0
JM Cox c sub b Kurram Shahzad	**55**	105	7	0
***JE Root** lbw b Mohd Abbas	**4**	13	0	0
HC Brook b Mohd Ali	**15**	26	2	0
DW Lawrence run out (Shan Masood)	**17**	41	1	0
†JL Smith b Mohd Ali	**61**	80	10	0
GAP Atkinson not out	**34**	27	5	0
OE Robinson b Mohd Ali	**0**	2	0	0
JC Archer b Mohd Abbas	**14**	13	1	1
JC Tongue not out	**1**	2	0	0
Extras (b2, lb10, nb10)	**22**			
Total (for 9, 56 overs)	**248**			

Fall 21, 26, 36, 77, 120, 187, 222, 222, 243.

Bowling Mohd Abbas 15-3-56-4; Khurram Shahzad 15-0-79-1; Mohd Ali 17-2-67-3; Ali Usman 9-1-34-0.

Pakistan Imam-ul-Haq, Azan Awais, Shan Masood, Abdullah Shafique, *Babar Azam, Saud Shakeel, †Mohammad Rizwan, Ali Usman, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Ali.

Toss Pakistan elected to field.

Umpires A Paleker (SA) and PR Reiffel (Aus)

Cox and Smith steady England after accuracy of Abbas rocks top order

Ali Martin
Lord's

Footage of Brydon Carse kept flashing up on the big screens at Lord's yesterday. Not *that* footage, of course, but rather the headline-grabbing fast bowler enjoying a refreshing can of the fizzy apple juice that is English cricket's "official drinks break partner". In fairness, both clips make a decent advert for sticking to the softies.

In Carse's absence - not that he was likely to play in the second Test - the metaphorical clouds hanging over this England team made way for the real thing. After being stuck in on a nibbling slow surface, a Swiss clock-precise seamer like Pakistan's Mohammad Abbas was only ever going to be a handful.

Abbas duly stamped his mark by nipping out four wickets that, with three from the more expressive Mohammad Ali, lifted Pakistan's mood significantly at 1-0 down. But for Jordan Cox's 55 and 61 from Jamie Smith, England's eventual 248 for nine from the 56 overs that were possible would have been considerably worse.

In a new-look England top seven still to fully congeal, these were also important knocks for the pair. Both have reputations as dashers but, with the ball in the ascendancy - unless it was dropping short of the slips - they played the percentage cricket that Joe Root is desperate to instil in his second spell as Test captain.

Cox in particular held the innings together, with 217 minutes of watchfulness - interspersed by punishment of the bad ball - continuing the good impression he has made at No 3. It took a jaw-dropping catch from a substitute fielder to remove him, with Salman Ali Agha - captain last week, dropped the next - as wide-eyed as anyone after the ball stuck in his diving right paw at third slip.

This brought an end to a precious 67-run sixth-wicket stand with Smith and while the wicketkeeper kicked on for a spell, he eventually became one of three men clean bowled before the gloom became too great. Given how one-sided events were at Headingley, the honours felt even in one respect but Pakistan's in another.

Either way, the series badly needed this kind of contest after the grim affair in the first Test. It remains to be seen if Marylebone Cricket Club can breathe a little easier about the pitch, however, because the nine wickets to fall could easily have swelled further had Ollie Robinson not been denied a late burst.

So far the surface is not quite the minefield witnessed during that rapid-fire Test against New Zealand in June, primarily because the bounce, while low, appears more consistent.

▲ *Joe Root was trapped lbw by Mohammad Abbas for four*

Although after rain forced an 80-minute delay to the start of play, it still looked like one that Abbas in particular would enjoy.

It took a little while for Pakistan to find their radar as 20 runs flowed from the first 19 deliveries. But once Abbas had Emilio Gay strangled down leg - not the first time the left-hander has fallen this way in his nascent Test career - he then wiped out Root and Ben Duckett in more familiar fashion.

Trapped lbw for 17 on review, Duckett was Abbas's 900th wicket in first-class cricket. That only 123 of these had come in the whites of Pakistan is a head-scratcher. Indeed, the 36-year-old has played just 25 Tests out of 59 since starring in their last win at Lord's eight years ago, despite averaging 22.5. Go figure.

Root, meanwhile, had spent far too much time in the buildup to this Test dealing with the Carse situation, bandwidth he would have preferred to put towards his own game. Not even a life gifted on one helped as, with Mohammad Rizwan up to the stumps, Abbas caught him on the crease for his eighth lbw in 11 innings.

At the other end Ali was struggling with the front line and already combustible due to the earlier catch going down off Root. Things improved for Ali on the stroke of the 2pm lunch, at least, when he bowled Harry Brook for 15 - a ball that deviated lavishly off the seam and whistled past an ambitious straight drive.

England reaching 80 for four at lunch made it Pakistan's session, clearly, only for Cox and Smith to flip this before tea. One wicket fell for exactly 100 runs in the second session and it was self-inflicted too, Dan Lawrence run out looking to pinch a non-existent single off the spin of Ali Usman and trudging off in disgust.

Lawrence did not look at ease for his 17, it must be said, not least compared with Cox at the other end. His penchant for the leg-side risks made him easy to tie down. Had Shan Masood not dropped a simple chance at mid-wicket to deny Khurram Shahzad, Lawrence would have fallen for 10.

Indeed, for all that Pakistan upped their game from last week, their fielding - Agha's wonder-catch off Cox aside - continues to hold them back. The most damaging missed opportunity came when Smith was dropped on 15 by Rizwan. It was a low chance, granted, but bad positioning given what little carry was on offer.

Ali was the bowler to miss out, his exasperation one of the enduring images of the day. He eventually took his colleagues out of the equation, cleaning up Smith and Robinson with balls that nipped in. Abbas repeated the dose for Jofra Archer late on to leave this second Test looking more intriguing than the last one.

Analysis

Simon Burnton *Lord's*

Pakistan's wicket-taking totem shines on familiar ground with place on honours board at stake

Halfway through the afternoon session, as drinks were taken after the completion of his 10th over, Mohammad Abbas waved at the Pakistan dressing room and beckoned on their physios. When they reached him he gestured at his right buttock and lay on his front while they worked extensively on his glutes and up his back.

Many of his teammates took the opportunity to sit down while England's batters stood chatting nearby, the drinks break extending by a few bonus minutes to allow for the repairs.

Enough time, it turned out, for minds to drift, focus to break. Abbas rose, dusted himself down and moved into his fielding position at mid-on; Imam-ul-Haq misfielded the next ball to gift Dan Lawrence a couple; Lawrence and Jordan Cox got into a muddle off the next and the former was run out, breaking a handy partnership of 43.

He had taken the first three wickets of the game for himself, but Abbas's skills are so finely honed he can create opportunities while completely immobile. While prone to taking wickets, here he helped take a wicket while prone.

A few minutes later, by bowling the final ball of his 12th over, Abbas took the number of deliveries he had sent down in first-class games on this ground to 738, one more than Jofra Archer. At least until England have to bowl, of those involved in this game only Ollie Robinson has flung down more red balls at Lord's than Pakistan's senior seamer.

Archer later lifted one Abbas delivery down the ground for six and clipped another through square-leg for four. Unlike his breaktime massage Abbas was not going to take that lying down; he quickly found a way past a wildly swinging bat to dismantle the stumps.

He is a visiting bowler playing in what are effectively home conditions: he has bowled more for Hampshire than for any other team and since getting special dispensation to play in England before Pakistan's Test series in 2018 he has played almost twice as many games in the County Championship (80) as in Pakistan's domestic first-class competition (41).

His first game at Lord's was in the 2018 series. "I wanted to get on the honours board, but I came close," he said afterwards and he could scarcely have come closer, taking four wickets in each innings. "However, if I get the chance to play a Test match in future at Lord's then that is definitely a target for me."

He has had to wait. Since first playing at Lord's in June 1954, Pakistan have averaged a game here every four years and never had as big a gap as the eight years, three months and three days that separated the start of that last game to this one. By the time he had bowled six overs England were three down and he had them all.

Abbas does nothing very quickly, except take wickets. If there was a bit of good fortune to the dismissal of Emilio Gay, superbly caught behind the stumps after tickling one down the leg-side, there was none as Ben Duckett was trapped lbw to become his 900th in first-class cricket, at an average just over 20. Joe Root followed soon after, also lbw, just as he had been the last time Abbas bowled at him on this ground.

▲ *Mohammad Abbas enjoys the moment after taking Emilio Gay's wicket*
TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

There is nothing flamboyant in the 36-year-old's appearance or in his action, nothing particularly compelling about him except the consistency of his bowling and the statistics that reflect it. Perhaps that is why he has never beguiled Pakistan's selectors as he has so many opposition batters, and why they have picked him with their customary inconsistency.

Though most of his wicket-taking was by then done, that spell either side of afternoon drinks, delivered despite sundry aches and pains, still illustrated Abbas's quality. He had been unable to bowl immediately after lunch because of time he spent off the field, but between him coming back on and the end of his spell nine overs brought 14 runs, no boundaries and that run-out. Between then and tea there were seven overs, eight boundaries and 51 runs as Cox and Jamie Smith cut loose.

Mohammad Ali was the more threatening bowler after lunch, rewarded with the dismissals of Smith and Robinson in a single over after the skies darkened and the floodlights came on, but Abbas as ever had the consistency. He came back to dismiss Archer and stand once again on four wickets in a Lord's Test innings.

The last ball of that over - and, as it turned out, the last of the day - caught the leading edge of Gus Atkinson's bat and flew over the slip cordon for four, the bowler's chances of a prized position on that honours board disappearing, for now. He has waited eight years, he can handle one more night.

ECB rights plan could lead to Test matches shown on ITV

Matt Hughes

The England and Wales Cricket Board is planning to offer more rights packages to free-to-air broadcasters in the next set of TV contracts that begin in 2029. The aim is to broaden the sport's appeal.

While the ECB will not follow Cricket Australia by offering a bespoke free-to-air package for domestic Test matches, its long-term partner Sky Sports could share some of its portfolio during the next rights cycle with ITV, whose £1.6bn takeover by Sky's US parent company, Comcast, is expected to be completed next year.

ITV is understood to be interested in the rights to the Hundred, which the ECB will facilitate by making more packages available on a non-exclusive basis. As well as the Hundred, the ECB will also offer FTA packages for a number of England's men's and women's white-ball matches.

Although formal discussions with ITV have yet to take place as the Comcast takeover remains subject to regulatory approval, Sky has privately indicated a willingness to share some of its sports rights with its new partner.

The BBC showed Test cricket from 1938 until 1998, when it lost the rights to Channel 4, which was then outbid by Sky Sports as Test cricket disappeared behind a paywall in 2006.

Channel 4 bought the rights for England's Test tour of India at the last minute during the 2021 Covid-19 lockdown, but no home Test matches have been broadcast FTA since Channel 4 covered England's Ashes victory in 2005. Sky's exclusive package began the following year.

Sky is halfway through a four-year deal worth £220m a year that gives it the live rights for all England's men and women home matches, the Hundred, Blast and some county cricket. It is expected to retain those rights from 2029 to 2033.

The next rights cycle is particularly significant for the ECB as it will be the last contract when England matches are sold together with the Hundred, as the new franchise owners will take charge of selling rights as a standalone event from 2033.

Sky and ITV are understood to be open to collaborating on other sports rights deals if the takeover receives regulatory approval, a process that is expected to take between 12 and 18 months.

The ECB enjoys a close relationship with Sky and a move to increase access to cricket by sharing occasional events with ITV would chime with the governing body's own plans.

Sky declined to comment, but a source said it was premature to discuss its plans for content sharing during the regulatory approval process.

ITV was contacted for comment.

PCB complain to Sky over Imran Khan coverage

Matt Hughes
Ali Martin
Simon Burnton

The Pakistan Cricket Board has made a formal complaint to Sky Sports after it broadcast an interview with Imran Khan's sons, Kasim and Sulaiman, during its coverage of yesterday's play at Lord's.

During the interview Khan's children raised concerns about the Pakistan government's treatment of the country's former prime minister, who has been held in solitary confinement for the past three years. Kasim Khan said: "It is not very clear what they are doing, just blatantly trying to kill him in there. Keep him in as long as possible, and silence him."

Khan's lawyers have described his living conditions as slow-motion murder, while his sister has claimed he has been tortured while in prison. The 73-year-old was moved to a hospital last week for treatment after a supreme court ruling permitted his temporary release, but has since been returned to prison.

The precise nature of the PCB's complaint is unknown other than the fact that Sky gave a platform to individuals critical of the government. Sky has acknowledged the complaint, but declined to comment when contacted.The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has also been made aware of the PCB's grievances, but declined to comment.

Meanwhile, Stuart Broad and Jimmy Anderson have criticised the "extreme and tiresome" flood of negative stories around the England cricket team's drinking and socialising habits, with Anderson saying it is "just mind-numbing that people can still be putting themselves in these positions".

The latest scandal involved Brydon Carse, who was pictured being led away from a Derby bar in handcuffs in the early hours of Sunday morning. Carse was dropped from the squad for the Test against Pakistan that started at Lord's yesterday.

▲ *Imran Khan has been in solitary confinement for the past three years*

"Eight of the 30 centrally contracted players have now been reprimanded or involved and that is quite extreme and actually quite tiresome," Broad said."

Anderson was fined for a breach of discipline at a nightclub in St Lucia during the 2007 World Cup, when he was 24. "I learned my lesson the hard way early on," he said. "I said to myself, 'Right, I'm not going out for the next two years.' It was a massive wake-up call. So it's just mind-numbing that people can still be putting themselves in these positions when there is so much attention around it.

"We went through our careers. People messed up and we were no angels - we enjoyed a beer and celebrated victory as hard as anyone," Anderson said. "But we had players who did that sort of policing. Someone would say, 'Just come away, you don't need another drink.'"

Dortmund the best of the rest as Bayern stand apart

If anyone can anyone stop the Bundesliga champions, it's Kovac's young side – but they still seem off the pace

Andy Brassell

The Franz Beckenbauer Supercup has a modicum more intensity than most of its European equivalents. The Bundesliga's traditional season curtain-raiser pitting league champions against cup winners is not played on neutral territory, giving it the feeling of a domestic game with proper stakes.

German fans would also never accept it taking place on foreign soil. It feels like a match, rather than a showpiece.

It had one other factor to ratchet up the adrenaline this year. It was the sense the two teams most expect to be the season's best, Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund, were the participants, with last term's second-placed side hosting the champions. There was enough in the game to suggest Dortmund may be able inconvenience their rivals, as Bayern held on to win the season's first trophy after BVB followed a thoroughly dominant first half from the visitors with a vastly improved second period.

But enough to create jeopardy? That was harder to buy into. We all know what it takes for someone else to win the title in Germany: an exceptional team, such as Jürgen Klopp's Dortmund or the Xabi Alonso-era Bayer Leverkusen, allied with a below-par Bayern. That second clause is far from being fulfilled.

For every action there is a reaction and in the past 15 years when Bayern have been domestically beaten it was met with a fierce response. So if Dortmund provoked Bayern to hit unimaginable levels with the 2013 treble, the same snap out of a deep funk has happened under Vincent Kompany. For Klopp's wins in 2011 and 2012, read 2023 – when Dortmund all but handed Bayern their title back on the final day – and 2024, when Alonso's Leverkusen finally took it away from them again. Once again, two years of fallibility was enough to make Bayern respond with force.

Bayern's Harry Kane hoists the Supercup

Kompany has transformed the team in terms of intensity and culture and that they have signed only two senior players – but excellent fits in Nathaniel Brown, who scored the opener in the Super Cup, and Ismaël Saibari – shows how difficult they are to improve.

Harry Kane, whose season opens with Bayern campaigning hard for his Ballon d'Or candidacy, is symbolic of just how relentless this Bayern vintage is. "It's always about sending a message," he said of Bayern's intentions. "Our momentum is to keep pushing, to keep pushing each other and to see how far we can go."

Dortmund have finally realised that spending on names to try to keep up is a flawed strategy. It has been a significant summer, shedding the salaries of Niklas Süle, Julian Brandt and Karim Adeyemi. The young Greeks Konstantinos Karetsas and Giannis Konstantelias have arrived to re-energise the midfield, which will suit the demands of the coach, Niko Kovac.

Going young is a smart and overdue move and they showed in the Supercup that, even if they are at the foot of the title mountain, they at last have sturdy walking shoes and plenty of drinking water.

What we can expect from Leverkusen and RB Leipzig is a little less clear. For Leverkusen, the 2024 champions, failing to make the Champions League places last season was a failure, but it allowed them to let Kasper Hjulmand go, drawing a line under a chaotic season that began with Erik Ten Hag's three-match reign.

They retain their ambition under the new coach, Carles Martínez, and new signings – including bringing back Moussa Diaby from Saudi Arabia – have underlined that. Leipzig will participate in the Champions League, but a concrete aim is hard to define. They had planned to hold on to Yan Diomandé, but the money on offer from Real Madrid became too much to resist, with RB receiving more than six times the €20m they paid Leganès for him the year before. The removal of Ole Werner as coach – sanctioned by Klopp before he took the Germany job – and his replacement with Martín Demichelis, who oversaw Mallorca's relegation in May, is a risk. Stuttgart and Sebastian Hoeness will hope to prove they can compete in Bundesliga and Champions League simultaneously – the final frontier at the club for arguably the league's most accomplished coach.

Many think they can already ink in first and last – Bayern and the first-timers Elversberg, representing a town of 13,000. But as BVB have already showed, a bit of tempo and youthful talent can shake up the expected order, even if only temporarily.

Spurs suffering from heavy summer exertions

Too many players are still off the pace and grumbling Roberto De Zerbi is quite willing to name names

David Hytner

Jan Paul van Hecke was among those given an unwanted name-check by Roberto De Zerbi after Tottenham's 3-0 defeat at Brentford on Saturday. Not at the right level physically, was the gist of the manager's comments.

De Zerbi also mentioned Marcos Senesi and Sandro Tonali, two more of the club's new signings. Their condition had to come as no surprise. It certainly did not to De Zerbi.

Take the case of Van Hecke, for whom the summer months have been a whirlwind. A few bullet-points from his timeline are worth noting. 18 June: joins Spurs from Brighton for £52m; 30 June: knocked out of World Cup with the Netherlands after last-32 penalty shootout defeat to Morocco; 23 July: boards team flight with Spurs for pre-season tour to New Zealand and Australia.

"It was a really short break," he says. "But I didn't want to miss anything in the pre-season. My first days [as a Spurs player] were in New Zealand and Australia."

The centre-half had never been to New Zealand and Australia and he enjoyed the experience, getting a good feeling from the welcome there. Van Hecke was struck by the fans' passion as well. That was the upside. The fallout from the downside continues to be felt.

"Physical-wise, of course, it impacts your body," he says. "I struggled for one or two weeks."

Whose idea was such a far-flung tour in a World Cup summer? Definitely not De Zerbi's. He inherited the schedule when he came to the club in late March and has done a fair bit of grumbling about it. "The trip was 25-26 hours," he said on Tuesday. "We played every three days. The day after [matches] we couldn't work in the right condition."

There appears to have been something of a quid pro quo arrangement with De Zerbi, who wanted to use the summer to close ranks and train. No travel. Just hard graft and tactical work.

Spurs' final game of the three on tour was against Chelsea in Sydney on 1 August. The club then arranged three further friendlies – against Getafe at the training ground in Enfield on 8 August before a double-header against Hoffenheim. Spurs played at their stadium against the German club on 15 August before hosting them at the training ground 24 hours later for a game with different players. De Zerbi was still not happy. "When we came back [to London] we couldn't work immediately because there was a friendly game against Getafe."

'Physical-wise, of course, it impacts your body. I struggled for one or two weeks after'

◀ *Jan Paul van Hecke had little time off between the World Cup and Tottenham's pre-season tour*
ANTHONY HANC/WIRED PHOTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Van Hecke did not play against Auckland or the first one in Australia against Sydney. He started against Chelsea. Then against Getafe and in the stadium fixture against Hoffenheim. His ratio of air miles to match minutes was high.

Senesi, who signed on a free transfer from Bournemouth on 1 July, did not go on tour because he played for Argentina in the World Cup final on 19 July. His first action for Spurs was in the stadium game against Hoffenheim. De Zerbi pitched him in from the start against Brentford alongside Van Hecke. It was logical that De Zerbi should lament Senesi's level. And also that of Van Hecke.

What raised eyebrows was that he added Tonali to the mix. The Italian did not play at the World Cup because his country failed to qualify. He signed for Spurs from Newcastle for £92.5m on 6 July. The 26-year-old had a full pre-season. That De Zerbi did not consider Tonali fully ready for Brentford felt like the ultimate indictment of the club's preparations.

De Zerbi left Tonali out of the squad for the 5-1 home win over Charlton in the Carabao Cup on Wednesday, along with Senesi, explaining that he preferred to put them through an intense training session on Tuesday so that they were better prepared for Saturday's home game against Newcastle.

The fixture will carry extra significance for Tonali. "On Saturday he will play in the first XI," said De Zerbi.

What about Micky van de Ven? Van Hecke's Dutch teammate travelled to New Zealand and Australia, but did not play there, in any of the subsequent pre-season games or against Brentford because of an injury. De Zerbi said last Friday it had been sustained on tour. "I don't know, the flight," said De Zerbi. "Something, not a big problem, but not right to work."

De Zerbi brought Van de Ven on as a substitute against Charlton. Ditto Pedro Porro, who did not kick a ball in pre-season after winning the World Cup with Spain. Neither did he feature against Brentford.

Destiny Udogie, who did not play in pre-season, was a substitute at Brentford and a starter against Charlton. He is playing catch-up. As is Rodrigo Bentancur, who was not a part of the tour after his World Cup exertions with Uruguay. He, too, was a substitute at Brentford and a starter against Charlton.

De Zerbi could enjoy the Charlton win even if there were caveats. Spurs were poor for the opening 30 minutes before they cut loose. The Charlton manager, Nathan Jones, made 10 changes. Spurs know Newcastle will present an altogether tougher challenge. It is time to dig deep.

Carabao Cup *Second round*

Dream debut for evergreen Welbeck in Chelsea stroll

Chelsea 2
Welbeck 50, Odoffin 79og

Luton 0

Jacob Steinberg
Stamford Bridge

One Argentinian is about to arrive and another looks destined for the exit. Chelsea have dealt with their most glaring weakness, Xabi Alonso's desire for a new goalkeeper satisfied by the club rushing to agree a £7.5m deal for Aston Villa's Emiliano Martínez, and it seems likely another nagging headache is about to ease.

Enzo Fernández was absent as Chelsea eased into the third round of the Carabao Cup with a 2-0 win over Luton. Manchester City are closing in on a deal for the midfielder but Alonso will be glad once the saga is over. Chelsea can do without the circus around Fernández. They showed the right attitude and were inspired by Danny Welbeck, going strong at 35 and in the right place to open this tie up with his first goal for his new side.

Alonso is making the moves of a manager determined to lay down a marker. It is not just how he has attacked the goalkeeping situation, even if the brutal response to Robert Sánchez's skittish display in the win over Fulham on Monday certainly underlines the increased sense of urgency at Chelsea. There was a frisson of excitement before kick-off here, news of the opportunistic swoop for Martínez well received by home fans, and it was also intriguing to see Alonso pick such a strong line-up given his side's heavy workload this week.

It felt unfair for Luton to have to find a way to keep Morgan Rogers and Cole Palmer quiet during a first half in which the shot count was 17-3 in Chelsea's favour. The pressure was relentless, although the visitors refused to roll over. Jack Wilshere's players threw themselves in front of shot after shot, blocked crosses and cut out through balls, helped by some inspired goalkeeping from Josh Keeley. An early double stop from Palmer was a highlight and a leaping save to keep out a free-kick from Reece James was another.

Luton lived on the edge at times. Welbeck, making his first start for Chelsea since joining from Brighton, pressed to win possession and had a shot blocked. Estêvão Willian broke down the right just before half-time and cut the ball back for Rogers, whose instant effort crashed back off the bar.

Alonso must have anticipated the quick kill. It was a surprise that James started for the second time in three days given his injury problems. Then again Chelsea were light on options in midfield with Moisés Caicedo unavailable again. Valentín Barco, Jude Bellingham's Atlanta irritant, partnered James and the focus was on an absent Argentinian. Fernández, desperate to leave, was not involved; City, desperate to land him, are expected to bid soon.

Assuming Fernández goes Chelsea's ability to cope without him will face tougher tests. Even so, Alonso could be pleased with this performance. Chelsea stayed patient at 0-0 and struck after upping the pace early in the second half. Estêvão slipped a pass down the outside for the overlapping Malo Gusto and the right-back's brilliant cross was met by Welbeck, who had the wit to creep off his marker and the ability to power a fine header home.

Third in League One, Luton began to tire. Palmer's footwork dazzled and he whipped a shot against the bar from 20 yards. The second goal was deserved. Barco forced a turnover, Palmer found Estêvão and the winger's shot went in off Hakeem Odoffin.

Chelsea were comfortable and there was not much for Mike Penders to do on his debut in goal. There was an expectation that Penders would challenge for the No 1 spot this season. The arrival of Martínez may change the immediate plans for the 21-year-old.

▲ *Danny Welbeck scores his first Chelsea goal with a header against Luton*
JACQUES FEENEY/OFFSIDE/GETTY IMAGES

Chelsea	Luton
4-2-3-1	**5-4-1**
Penders; Gusto (Hato 67), Acheampong, Lacroix, Chavarría; James (Neto 67), Barco; Estêvão (Gittens 80), Palmer, Rogers (Lavia 68); Welbeck (João Pedro 73)	Keeley; Ashby, Odoffin, Johnston, Johnson ●, Benagr (Jones 61); Kodua (Richards ht), Walsh, Palmer (Cole 78), Lawrence (Fox 61); Marshall (Wells 78)

Referee Elliot Bell

Chelsea agree £7.5m Martínez deal while Villa land Goretzka

Jacob Steinberg

Chelsea have agreed a £7.5m deal to sign the Aston Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez and are expecting Manchester City to make an offer for Enzo Fernández in the next 48 hours.

Xabi Alonso identified the signing of a goalkeeper as a priority after Robert Sánchez struggled against Fulham on Monday and the deal for Martínez has gone through quickly. The Argentina international is out of favour at Villa after their acquisition of Zion Suzuki and is due to sign a two-year contract with the option of a further year.

The signing of Martínez, who will be 34 next week, will raise questions over the future of Sánchez. Sources believe the Spaniard is unlikely to accept losing his spot as No 1 and may need to be moved on before the window shuts on Tuesday night.

Another complication for Chelsea will be working out what to do with Mike Penders, who was expected to challenge for the No 1 shirt this season. There is a feeling that Penders could leave on loan. The highly rated 21-year-old Belgian spent last season on loan at Strasbourg.

It is poised to be a busy end to the summer for Chelsea, who are also dealing with City's attempts to sign Fernández. The Argentina midfielder is desperate to leave and was left out of the side for last night's Carabao Cup tie against Luton.

Sources at Chelsea insist a deal is not close and that there has yet to be any communication from City. Chelsea are adamant that Fernández will be sold only on their terms. City missed an unofficial deadline to sign the midfielder for £120m this month and there have been suggestions the price could be higher because the end of the window is approaching.

Chelsea are aware Bournemouth do not want to sell Alex Scott and that Crystal Palace are similarly determined to hold on to Adam Wharton. Chelsea may not look for a direct replacement for Fernández but will not accept weakening their squad by helping out a rival.

Aston Villa, meanwhile, have signed the Germany midfielder Leon Goretzka on a free after his departure from Bayern Munich. The 31-year-old spent eight seasons at Bayern, making 312 appearances.

"I had a bit of long vacation, and it was a process to find out what I really wanted. From the first moment, I had a really good feeling, and I'm really happy to be here," Goretzka said.

▲ *A relieved Rodrigo Muniz enjoys ending his year-long Fulham goal drought*
TOM DULAT/GETTY IMAGES

Smith Rowe and Muniz brush aside Wimbledon

Fulham 3
Smith Rowe 37, Muniz 42, García 90+3

AFC Wimbledon 0

John Brewin
Craven Cottage

Fulham's second London derby this week, a first competitive win for Álvaro Arbeloa. If AFC Wimbledon represent a different echelon to Chelsea, Monday's visitors, last night's easy progress to the third round supplied a number of reasons for optimism in the new regime.

Marco Silva, Arbeloa's predecessor, frequently offered sullen dismissal of the depth of his Fulham squad but actually left behind plenty of talent on departing for Benfica. Getting a better tune from Emile Smith Rowe and Rodrigo Muniz than Silva managed last season will be helpful. The pair scored the first-half goals to take the tie from Wimbledon's reach.

A muggy riverside evening had attracted a decent enough attendance. More than enough to disrupt the dog walkers and evening strollers of a genteel locale, the Wimbledon contingent making sure to be heard. The first meeting between the clubs since 2001, before the old Wimbledon was franchised to Milton Keynes and a phoenix club rose from the pyre of that rotten affair.

The respective team selections revealed the managers' priorities; 10 changes for Arbeloa, only Oscar Bobb remaining from Monday's home defeat by Chelsea; six for Johnnie Jackson, the Wimbledon manager. Fulham featured Shea Charles, making his first start. Luc de Fougerolles, who played in the summer's World Cup for Canada, was making only his second Fulham appearance. Down each team's left, a Sessegnon brother, Ryan for Fulham and Steven, formerly of Fulham himself, for Wimbledon.

Wafting high and wide, De Fougerolles had the first genuine effort after 12 minutes of feeling each other out. Wimbledon, maintaining Crazy Gang traditions, were most dangerous from set pieces. When De Fougerolles could only head away a corner, the ball fell to Dons' skipper Alistair Smith. The shot was straight at Benjamin Lecomte.

Callum Maycock might have scored had he better directed Myles Hippolyte's arrowing cross but thereafter Fulham began to pile up opportunities, and eventually goals. Emile Smith Rowe missed a pearling chance, furious with himself on doing so. Rodrigo Muniz was just as self-flagellating when ballooning a Smith Rowe flick into the Putney End.

Smith Rowe's redemption came swiftly, from close range after James Tilley could only direct a header into danger, the celebration minimal. Muniz was far more rapturous after nodding in Kenny Tete's cross. Small wonder. It was his first goal since the opening game of last season.

Bobb was rested from half-time as Macaulay Zepa, 18, arrived. Arbeloa's appointment was accompanied by heralding of his youth development work at Real Madrid, a different approach from Silva's preference for hard-bitten pros. Zepa, speedy and direct in his running, was full of promise.

Muniz's swelling confidence was evidenced by some acrobatics, while Hippolyte, Wimbledon's 2025 play-off hero, also attempted the spectacular from long range. In defence, Fulham's youth and experience combination of De Fougerolles and Joachim Andersen remained assured and Calvin Bassey replaced the senior partner on the hour. The youngster did not last much longer, pulling up after a block tackle, and taken down the tunnel.

The arrivals of Gonzalo García and César Palacios, the young Madrilenos who accompanied Arbeloa to west London, supplied further excitement, more promise for the future, García scoring deftly in injury-time. Zepa, with fellow youth graduate Chibby Nwoko now in midfield, continued his impressive debut, giving Wimbledon's Sessegnon quite the chasing. West Ham await this new Fulham in the next round.

Fulham	AFC Wimbledon
4-2-3-1	**3-4-2-1**
Lecomte; Tete ●, Andersen (Bassey 62), De Fougerolles (Nwoko 68), Sessegnon; Charles, Reed; Kevin (Palacios 73), Smith Rowe, Bobb (Zepa ht); Muniz (García 73)	Bishop; Yiadom, Sweeney, Seddon; Sessegnon, Harrison (McCoy-Splatt 86), Smith, Tilley (Nkeng 80); Maycock (Nelson ● 67), Hippolyte (Hackford 80; Sasu (Stockley 67)

Referee Anthony Backhouse **Attendance** 17,714

Fifa's unfurling crisis

28 July

Secret exposed
A report in the Times exposes Infantino's secret £3.1bn plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors, potentially earning him tens of millions of pounds.

30 July

Uefa's threat
After the Guardian exposes the full details of Fifa's plan drawn up with JP Morgan, Uefa holds an emergency meeting where all 55 members agree to boycott Fifa events if it goes ahead.

31 July

Backlash begins
Hours after Fifa's own chief operating officer slates the proposal, Andy Burnham becomes the first head of a major nation to call its architect, Infantino, to resign as Fifa's president.

1 August

On second thoughts
Infantino issues a new statement, withdrawing the plan, But Uefa still ups the pressure on him, saying the Fifa leadership has "lost our confidence".

2 August

Trump won't pick up
The New York Post claims Infantino has "repeatedly tried" to call the US president, Donald Trump, for help, but Trump isn't answering.

3 August

Support melts away
Coordinated withdrawal of support begins. The football federations of England, Wales and Serbia join Finland and Sweden in demanding change at the top.

Uefa raises stakes in battle to unseat Infantino but obstacles remain

Europe's governing body will hope criminal claim can peel support from Fifa president but it will not be easy

Matt Hughes

Anyone who interpreted Uefa's decision to withdraw a proposed boycott of Fifa competitions, revealed by the Guardian on Wednesday, as a backward step in the attempt to remove Gianni Infantino as Fifa's president has been quickly disabused of that notion.

In a stunning development that overshadowed one of the biggest days in the European football calendar as national football federation and club executives gathered for the Champions League draw in Monte Carlo, Uefa announced it was preparing to make a legal complaint against Infantino in Switzerland alleging "criminal mismanagement" for his role in the failed World Cup sell-off plan.

Uefa, having removed the immediate pressure on Fifa on one front by permitting European teams to play in next month's Under-20 Women's World Cup and October's senior Women's World Cup qualifiers, has dramatically increased the stakes on another.

The first step in that legal process is seeking disclosure in the United States of documents relating to the abandoned Fifa Forward Enterprise (FFE) proposal, which Uefa described in a 56-page document sent to three US courts as having an "absurdly low enterprise value of only approximately $20bn" (£14.7bn).

From the moment it became clear Infantino would not resign after withdrawing the FFE plan four days after it became public, Uefa has been pursuing the valuation issue, which if the sale had progressed would have enabled Joshua Kushner's Thrive Capital to buy 21% of future Fifa revenues in perpetuity for $4.2bn.

The Guardian revealed on 6 August that Uefa was commissioning an independent valuation of FFE amid concerns Infantino was planning to sell off football's crown jewel on the cheap, a feeling exacerbated by the fact Fifa's sales deck did not contain any information on the valuation process or evidence of a competitive tender.

As one source who questioned Fifa's valuation said this month: "We need to find out if they were selling the World Cup at a knockdown price." The intention to bring a criminal complaint is the logical extension of this process.

Even the most cursory of inquiries over the past few weeks vindicated Uefa's concerns. Fifa's revenue for the four-year cycle that culminated in this summer's World Cup was $15bn, leading market analysts to suggest that $20bn was a low valuation, particularly as the proposal did not appear to include provisions to prevent expansion and the creation of new tournaments.

Kushner's subsequent purchase of the LA Lakers with the former Disney chief Bob Iger for $12.5bn further convinced Uefa that Thrive Capital had been given a sweetheart deal by Infantino, a conviction underlined by its suspicion that Infantino was lining up a lucrative role worth tens of millions of pounds a year as FFE's chair after standing down as Fifa's president, which he plans to do in 2031 if he wins a further, final term.

▲ *Uefa's president, Aleksander Ceferin (right), at the Champions League draw on another dramatic day*
SÉBASTIEN NOGIER/EPA

Infantino's determination to cling to office - demonstrated by his decision to enter campaign mode by attending a meeting of the Caribbean Football Union last weekend in the Dominican Republic where, as the Guardian revealed, he suddenly approved several funding projects - emboldened Uefa further.

Uefa has taken the legal route after being thwarted in numerous requests to Fifa to disclose documents. It has made court filings in New York, Florida and Colorado to obtain papers it may submit to Swiss courts seeking criminal charges. Just as significant as the attempt to take Infantino to court in his adopted country is Uefa's attempt to rally Fifa members behind it in its attempt to unseat him via March's presidential election.

For all Uefa's public bullishness that Infantino's race is run, several senior figures there and among its allies at Concacaf - the North and Central American and Caribbean confederation - have admitted concerns to the Guardian that they are struggling to get many member associations outside Europe to turn against him. Over the past few weeks several FAs have privately indicated it may take evidence of criminal activity, or at least proof that Infantino would have been personally enriched by the FFE venture, for them to abandon him.

Even those with a brief knowledge of Fifa's history would agree that the rebels concerned about momentum to unseat Infantino stalling have a point.

4 August

Mattias turns
More key allies distance themselves from the Fifa president, including his No 2, Mattias Grafström, who calls the plan a "sad and reproachable series of events".

5 August

Summit in Morocco
Infantino calls a Fifa staff crisis meeting in Morocco. Fifa then issues a statement saying staff gave him their unanimous backing while also putting his critics on notice

6 August

Players' union wades in
Fifpro, the global players' union,says that, while Infantino's scheme is gone, "the abuse of power that produced it is not … Reforms, not a cover-up, are needed."

7 August

Battle lines drawn
Allies begin to surface as Mexico and Argentina follow Africa's governing body in rallying round Infantino - but Norway's FA calls for him to go

26 August

Boycott axed
Uefa says it will drop its threatened boycott of Fifa competitions after receiving guarantees it will never attempt a repeat of Infantino's scheme to sell shares in the World Cup.

Although he loves to paint the world governing body as the ultimate democracy underpinned by a one-member, one-vote system, the reality is anything but. Although elections are held every four years there have been only three permanent presidents in the past 52 years, and the last to leave office after a vote was England's Sir Stanley Rous in 1974.

Rous's conqueror, the Brazilian João Havelange, resigned after 24 years and was later found to have accepted bribes related to the sale of media rights by a Fifa ethics committee. His successor, Sepp Blatter, stood down after winning five elections in the midst of an FBI investigation in 2015, which has resulted in more than 20 criminal convictions in the US and could lead to more.

Any hope among the rebels that the Swiss authorities will come to their aid and bring Infantino to court should be tempered by those authorities' long history of turning a blind eye to Fifa corruption, which meant intervention from the FBI was required to expose and punish it.

Champions League

Arsenal to host Real Madrid while City visit old friend Rodri

Nick Ames
Monte Carlo

Arsenal face mouthwatering assignments against Real Madrid and Bayern Munich as they bid to go one better than last season's agonising near miss and win a first Champions League title.

Mikel Arteta's side were pipped on penalties by Paris Saint-Germain in the final three months ago and will be expected to cruise through this season's league phase. The bulk of their draw appears kind but they are tasked with a visit to the Allianz Arena to play Bayern, whom they beat 3-1 at the Emirates Stadium last November, and host Real, who are once again under the charge of José Mourinho. Two seasons ago, Arsenal beat the Spanish giants 3-0 at home in a quarter-final first leg, Declan Rice scoring two memorable free-kicks.

Arsenal will also welcome Borussia Dortmund, Lille and the Azerbaijani debutants Sabah to north London. Their other away fixtures involve trips to Napoli, Slavia Prague and a reunion with their ex-player Héctor Bellerin at Real Betis.

Manchester City will swiftly renew acquaintances with Rodri when they visit Barcelona during Enzo Maresca's first Champions League campaign in charge. They will greet Kevin De Bruyne and Napoli at the Etihad Stadium, just as they did last season in cruising to a 2-0 win. Their other home ties bring an enticing meeting with the reigning champions, PSG, a tie against Sporting and a visit by AEK Athens. Trips to Porto, RB Leipzig and Lens will round off their schedule.

The return of Manchester United to Europe's elite competition throws up home games with Bayern, Roma, RB Leipzig and Sabah. Michael Carrick's team will travel to Como along with Atlético Madrid, Sporting and Villarreal.

Liverpool will host Atlético, Porto, Villarreal and Lens. They visit Lask, the newcomers who sensationally beat Celtic on Tuesday, along with Club Brugge, Fenerbahce and Inter in a relatively kind-looking set of games.

Aston Villa, ravaged in recent weeks by the departures of key players, will hope to have strengthened for a home tie with PSG and a visit to Barcelona. Dortmund, Fenerbahce and the Norwegian new boys Viking Stavanger will also visit Villa Park. Unai Emery will also take his team to Club Brugge, Galatasaray and Slavia Prague.

While Chelsea did not qualify for European competition this season, their home will still host Champions League football. The Ukrainian champions, Shakhtar Donetsk, still unable to play continental matches in their homeland, will stage home games there. Real Madrid are the most high-profile of their visitors.

PSG's bid to win a third successive Champions League title involves home league games against Barcelona, Roma, Galatasaray and Slovan Bratislava, as well as trips to Villarreal, Como, City and Villa.

The first set of fixtures will be played on 8 and 9 September. The schedule and dates for all eight match weeks will be announced tomorrow.

Who the Premier League teams will face

Schedule to be released tomorrow

Arsenal
Real Madrid (h), Bayern Munich (a), Borussia Dortmund (h), Real Betis (a), Lille (h) Napoli (a), Sabah (h), Slavia Prague (a)

Aston Villa
Paris Saint-Germain (h), Barcelona (a), Borussia Dortmund (h), Club Brugge (a), Fenerbahce (h), Galatasaray (a), Viking (h), Sl Prague (a)

Liverpool
Atlético Madrid (h), Inter (a), Porto (h), Club Brugge (a), Villarreal (h), Fenerbahce (a), Lens (h), Lask (a)

Manchester City
Paris Saint-Germain (h), Barcelona (a), Sporting (h), Porto (a), Napoli (h), RB Leipzig (a), AEK Athens (h), Lens (a)

Manchester United
Bayern Munich (h), Atlético Madrid (a), Roma (h), Sporting (a), RB Leipzig (h), Villarreal (a), Sabah (h), Como (a).

League phase:
Matchday 1: 8-10 September 2026
Matchday 2: 13/14 October 2026
Matchday 3: 20/21 October 2026
Matchday 4: 3/4 November 2026
Matchday 5: 24/25 November 2026
Matchday 6: 8/9 December 2026
Matchday 7: 19/20 January 2027
Matchday 8: 27 January 2027

Final: Estadio Metropolitano, Saturday 5 June

Football In brief

Conference League

Rangers out of Europe after defeat by Jablonec

Rangers were left reeling as they crashed out of the playoffs with a 4-3 penalty shootout defeat by Jablonec in Czechia. Leading 1-0 from the first leg at Ibrox last week, Derek McInnes's side turned in a turgid performance which lacked creativity and invention. Jablonec's Vakhtang Tchanturishvili levelled the tie in the 73rd minute with a goal which took the game to 1-1 on aggregate. There were no more goals in extra time and although the Rangers goalkeeper, Ivor Pandur, saved from Filip Zorvan, Rangers forward Findlay Curtis fired over the bar and James Penrice was thwarted by the Jablonec goalkeeper Jan Hanus, leaving Jan Chramosta to score the decisive spot-kick. **PA Media**

Wrexham

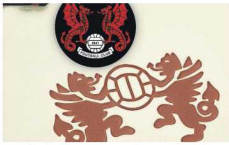
Orient riled by Red Dragons' new badge

Leyton Orient have criticised Wrexham's owners, Ryan Reynolds and Rob Mac, for putting a badge on their new kit that mirrors their own. The Welsh club unveiled their new third strip yesterday and the badge raised eyebrows as Wrexham deviated from their traditional crest. Instead, the badge was replaced with two wyverns or dragons facing each other over a football and looking remarkably like the crest Orient introduced in 1976 to reflect the club's links with the City of London and the Thames. "What you playing at @VancityReynolds @ RMcElhenney?," posted Orient on social media. **PA Media**

Nottingham Forest

Delap seals £45m move from Chelsea

Nottingham Forest have completed the signing of Liam Delap from Chelsea in a club-record £45m deal. The 23-year-old striker has signed a five-year contract at Forest after he was told he was not part of Xabi Alonso's plans. Forest's manager, Oliver Glasner, made him a priority during the transfer window and Delap said: "I spoke to the manager and I like his way, I think he can be the one to really help me develop and make that next step and hopefully I can bring goals here."**AFP**



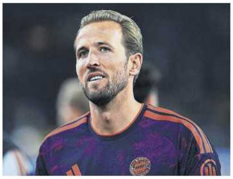
▲ *The badge on Wrexham's third kit is very similar to Orient's club crest*

The Guardian
Friday
28 August
2026

Sport

Eurovision

Arsenal to face Kane again and City set for PSG showdown



Page 43 →

Top Dan

Welbeck scores first Chelsea goal in Carabao win over Luton

Page 41 →

‘Dereliction of duty’ Uefa ready to bring criminal claims against Infantino

Nick Ames *Monte Carlo*
Alexander Abnos *New York*

Uefa is preparing to make a criminal complaint against Gianni Infantino for alleged “criminal mismanagement” in connection with his failed Fifa Forward Enterprise plan and has applied for the release of documents related to its conception.

In an explosive escalation of the war engulfing football’s governing bodies, Uefa has made separate applications in the United States for information, including from Fifa and the investment firm Thrive Capital.

The request explains Uefa and other interested parties are “preparing to bring criminal claims in Switzerland against Infantino and possible other Fifa officials and advisers for criminal mismanagement under Article 158 of the Swiss Criminal Code”.

Thrive Capital, led by Joshua Kushner, was to be the lead investor in Infantino’s plan. Uefa has used a “section 1782” order in seeking release of the relevant documents. Such a request lets an interested party in a foreign legal proceeding ask for discovery of information from an entity based in the US.

The court documents pay particular attention to the “absurdly low enterprise value of only approximately $20bn” (£14.7bn) implied by Infantino’s scheme to sell a 20% chunk of Fifa tournaments for $4.2bn. The figure is claimed to be “neither the product of an open, competitive auction, nor tested by any independent valuer”.

Uefa claims “a valuation exceeding $30bn is readily supportable” through assessment of Fifa’s financial performance and market conditions. Additionally, comparisons are drawn with the deal Infantino pursued in 2018 with a consortium led by the Japanese firm SoftBank. The submission points out that the proposal, which was dropped, would have committed about $25bn for a 12-year interest in the Nations League and an expanded Club World Cup.

Infantino is accused of a “stunning dereliction of duty” in sidelining the Fifa Council when tabling the plan. The documents also highlight the expedited timeline member associations were given to back the scheme and the $40m “inducement” they were offered to do so.

This month Uefa’s lawyers had told Infantino and Fifa to “take immediate steps to identify, locate and preserve all documents and electronically stored information described in this notice that are in your or Fifa’s possession, custody, or control”. They had named 14 executives who were required to “specifically preserve all such materials in their possession, custody, or control”.

Uefa has filed a request for discovery in US District Court for the Eastern District of New York, which if granted would enable it to subpoena Kushner and Thrive for documents relating to Fifa’s FFE proposal, and allow Uefa attorneys to depose Kushner.

In a 56-page filing that contains a section headlined “the enduring history of corruption among Fifa officials”, Uefa’s attorneys describe FFE as “a vehicle for Infantino and that small circle to acquire a permanent stake in and otherwise profit from Fifa’s most valuable assets to the detriment of Fifa, its members, and other parties within the football family”.

Uefa clarifies that “neither Thrive nor Kushner is an anticipated defendant in the contemplated Swiss criminal proceeding”.

Uefa’s executive committee and about 35 presidents of its members were informed of the latest developments at a meeting in Monte Carlo, shortly before the Champions League draw. It was also confirmed that, as reported by the Guardian, the proposed boycott of Fifa tournaments has been shelved after Fifa provided the necessary assurances that no version of FFE would be tabled.

Uefa also confirmed its intention to ensure Infantino faces an opponent if he is still in position when the election for Fifa’s leadership is held in March.

Fifa and Thrive Capital have been contacted for comment. *

How Uefa has upped the stakes in football’s civil war
Matt Hughes *Page 42* →

Resurgent Pakistan’s prize guy

Salman Agha is mobbed after catching out Jordan Cox, whose dogged 55 helped England recover
Second Test reports *Page 38* →

STU FORSTER/GETTY IMAGES

Liverpool get green light to sign Barcola for £120m

Andy Hunter

Liverpool are closing in on a £120m deal for Bradley Barcola after a breakthrough in talks with Paris Saint-Germain and will attempt to “improve other areas” according to the head coach, Andoni Iraola.

Barcola has been Liverpool’s main transfer target all summer only for PSG’s £145m valuation to prove a significant hurdle. However, negotiations on Wednesday night ended in an outline agreement being reached over a compromise fee. Liverpool will pay a guaranteed sum of just over £100m for the France international, with add-ons based on individual and team success, taking the overall package to about £120m.

The full structure of the deal has not been finalised, but the breakthrough, coupled with PSG’s willingness to lower their asking price for the 23-year-old, should allow Barcola to complete his move before Tuesday’s transfer deadline. Liverpool were informed last month the player was keen to join them, having fallen down the pecking order at PSG.

▲ *Bradley Barcola has been keen to leave PSG after falling out of favour*

The arrival of Barcola - and sources insist the deal is not done yet - would make him the second-most expensive signing in Liverpool’s history behind the £125m Alexander Isak, but the club have still to land a replacement for Mohamed Salah on the right. While Barcola and a replacement for Salah are Liverpool’s priorities for the remainder of the window, Iraola wants to strengthen in other areas.

“Ideally is the magic word,” Iraola said. “We don’t know what we can do, but it’s true the priority has been mostly in the wide areas. We have four or five days. I am sure if we can improve other areas we will but I don’t know how the market is going to finish.”